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MUDGE AND HER CHICKS

A STORY OF CHILDRENS HOME DOING

BY A BROTHER AND SISTER

Violet in her uncle's study.—*Page* 40.

MUDGE

AND HER CHICKS.

BY

A BROTHER AND SISTER.

GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,

SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERY AND HARRIS,

WEST CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.

E. P. DUTTON & CO., NEW YORK.

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TO

VIOLET OVERTON,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY

F. P. C. AND F. C.

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MUDGE AND HER CHICKS.

CHAPTER I.

VIOLET AND FRANK.

'ISN'T it time they were here, Frankie?'

'Why, no, Violet; the train doesn't get to King's Cross till nearly five o'clock, and it's only half-past now; and then, you know, they'll be quite an hour getting down here.'

'Oh dear!' said little Violet; 'I wish they'd be quick. I *do* so want to see Ernie, and have some jolly games; we don't have any fun when he's away,' and she rolled herself over on the rug in a little impatient way.

'Now, Violet, don't crumple yourself up. Your clean pinafore won't be fit for anything, and a nice sight you'll be when Mother and Ernie come.'

'I don't care; Mother never scolds me about my

things. *You* always make such a fuss about things; and I'm sure you don't look so very grand yourself. There!'

'Well, Violet, you *are* spoilt; there's Granny spoils you, and Mother, and Auntie Brooks, and Ernie, and the servants; and I'm sure I give in to you always, and let you have your own way.'

'And quite right too, because I'm a girl.'

'I don't quite see that,' said Frank. 'At any rate, as you always get your own way, you might be better tempered; and you needn't say we don't have any fun when Ernie's away: I'm sure we've had lots of games at trains.'

'Yes, so we have! But you don't play as well as Ernie, and it isn't so jolly.'

'You nasty, cross little thing, after I've made you that beautiful new station, too!'

'Oh, I was forgetting that! Yes, it was rather clever of you, and it'll be something to show Ernie: we hadn't a station at America when he was home in the summer; we'd only Europe, Asia, and Africa, and none of them have got a nice wooden platform like America.'

'No!' said Frank; 'and if it hadn't been for that old dresser drawer, I couldn't have made one there; and then, you know, Violet, we've the two flags Mother made us. Ernie was always wanting a red and a green flag to show when there was any danger

on the line, and when it was all right; so he'll be very glad to have them.'

'Oh, why don't they come?' said Violet. 'I know it must be seven o'clock. I don't believe you know the time, Frank; it's ages since you said it was past five.'

'Nonsense, Violet; it's a quarter to six now, and I daresay by a quarter past they'll be here. It'll take a little time to see the luggage sent off.'

'Why can't they carry it, then? I'm sure I should. This is a stupid station, with no cabs or anything. I hate it.'

'Don't be so cross, Leta.'

They were both quiet for a few minutes, staring at the fire, and then Violet suddenly clapped her hands and said:

'Oh, I say, Frankie! I've been thinking how nice it would be if we had a dog to play with; wouldn't it, now?'

'Yes; I *should* like that—one of those jolly, big black fellows with curly hair.'

'No; I don't care for them,' said Violet. 'I want one with soft, white silky hair, like this hearthrug; it's so nice to stroke.'

'I like a big dog—bigger than you, Violet.'

'You stupid! He would knock you down if you played with him.'

'There wouldn't be much fun in that; and besides,

if he was as strong as all that, he'd upset *you* when he wagged his tail.'

'Well, I shan't have him; so there, nasty rude thing. What a long time Ernie is coming; I don't believe they'll be here all night.'

'I think you like Ernest much better than me, Leta.'

'No; I don't really, Frank. Only, you see, Ernie is my big brother, and you're only my little brother, so I ought to think more of him.'

'Well, I don't see that at all; and then you and I are always together, and he only comes home for holidays.'

'Then I needn't think so much of you, because I can always have you; but Ernie I can't get often; and then he's so much older, Frankie, don't you know?'

'Why, he's only eleven, and I'm just eight; so there isn't much difference to make a fuss about.'

'I call that a great many years,' said Violet in a solemn voice.

'Oh, indeed; then I'm a *great many years* older than you, for you're only six, and I think you ought to treat me with more *despect;*' after which remark Frank turned his back on Violet, and there was again a short silence.

'There's Mary taking in the tea things,' said Violet, 'so they can't be long coming now. I wonder what we're going to have for tea; do you know, Frank?'

'No, I don't,' said Frank in rather an injured voice; 'only I saw the baker give cook one of those nice cakes.'

'I don't care about cakes; they're nasty things.'

'That shows what a stupid little thing you are, Violet.'

'Does it, though? I shall give you a great bang for saying such a thing, you rude boy.' As Violet was going to give her 'great bang' with much energy, she stumbled over Frank's foot, and they both rolled over on the rug, and Violet began to cry, and pulled Frank's hair; and he was just going to follow her example, when he suddenly called out:

'Here they are, Leta!' and they both rushed out of the room to the front door, quite forgetting their little quarrel, and met Ernie just as he bounded into the house.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

IS there a happier moment in a child's life than that of its arrival home for the holidays? When Ernest Orington and his mother reached the gates of Lambton Hall, the boy threw them open, rushed up the avenue, bounded up the steps, and gave a violent pull at the bell. His face was beaming with health and happiness; his dark bright eyes were brighter than ever, and his cheeks were like rosy-red apples.

'Steady, my boy, steady,' said his mother; 'you'll break the bell.'

'I'm in such a hurry, Mudge dear; I want to see them all.'

Mrs. Orington had married when very young, and the children looked upon her as a companion, and had various pet names for her.

Ernest's impatience did not last long; for his grandmother, guessing from the violence of the ring who was at the door, did not wait for the servant to come up, but opened the door herself.

And what a welcome the boy got from Granny, and Frank, and Violet! They all tried which should make the most of him. Violet hugged him so much that she almost strangled him.

'Let him get his great-coat off, Violet,' said Granny, 'and come to a nice warm fire.'

'Oh, I'm not cold!' said Ernest; 'I'm very warm.'

The weather was frosty and cold; but what cares a boy for the cold when he is coming home again to brother, and sister, and mother, and granny? Even the long journey in the train from Yorkshire had not been enough to cool his blood.

They were soon seated at the tea-table; and a very sumptuous table it was, for Granny had provided all sorts of good things in honour of Ernest's arrival. But the children were too much excited to care about eating, and half the good things remained untasted. There was a great clatter of voices, for every one had got so much to tell, and Violet and Frank began to quarrel as to which should tell all the news first.

'And I've made such a beautiful new station, and'— commenced Frank.

'Now, Frank,' broke in Violet, 'it's my station, and you must let me tell all about it. Mudge dear, mayn't I tell about the station and the flags?'

'I think you had all better talk less and eat more,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Oh dear!' said Violet in an affected manner; 'I don't care about eating and drinking, it's such a bore. I have quite finished.'

Violet Orington was not like most little girls of six years old. She was in some things very forward for her age, and very much liked talking with grown-up people, and asking all sorts of odd questions. She often used long words that she heard her mother or granny use, and seemed quite to understand the meaning of them. She was not to be bribed, as some children are, with a piece of cake, or something nice to eat to keep her quiet; for she was dainty, and it was with some difficulty she could be persuaded to eat and drink enough to be good for her health. She often said clever things, and people laughed at her little sayings, and repeated them; and this made her rather conceited, as it would make most little girls. And of course it made her *try* to say clever things, and thus she grew to be a little bit affected sometimes. So when she said with a pretty little toss of her head, and pushing away her plate from her, that eating was a great bore, she thought she had said something clever.

'Mayn't the children go, Mother dear?' said Ernest; 'they are tired of waiting for me, and to tell the truth, I was rather hungry.' He was attacking a slice of cake, which he seemed to be particularly enjoying. He always spoke of his brother and

sister as the children, for he considered himself quite a man in comparison; and though he thoroughly enjoyed his games with them, he always spoke of it as 'amusing the children.'

'No,' said Mrs. Orington; 'they must be patient until every one has finished, and they must soon go to bed; for tea is very late to-night, and it's nearly bed-time.'

'Please, Mudge dear, do let us sit up a little longer to-night, as it's Ernest's first night. Won't you, darling Mudgems? I do love to sit up at night.'

'Yes, and have a pale face in the morning.'

'Oh no! I'll promise to have such a red face. I'll tell Maria to scrub it hard when she is washing me.'

'You silly Leta!' said Frank; 'as if that would make any difference.'

'I'm not a silly, Frank, and I won't be called a silly. You're a silly, because you like to have my old doll to take to bed with you. You know you do, Frank; and such a nasty old doll, too! I wouldn't speak to that doll, she's so shabby.'

'Which one is that, Leta?' asked Ernest.

'Why, it's May Georgina.'

'May Georgina! Why, you only had her last May, you know; that's why you christened her May,' exclaimed Ernest.

'Well, that's a long time ago,' said Violet; 'and she's quite worn out, and looks like the old maids at Cedar Cottage. I can't bear old maids. I think they ought to be buried like my dolls. Mudge dear, may I bury May Georgina in the asparagus bed?'

'I'm afraid she would not improve the asparagus,' said Mrs. Orington; 'and don't talk nonsense about old maids, Violet, because you know nothing about it. Some maiden ladies are very nice, like your Aunt Emma.'

'Yes, Mudgy dear, but she's not an old maid. Old maids are people who look cross, and ugly, and hate children, like the Miss Spinkses. They've got both our last new balls in their garden, Ernie dear, and won't throw them back. We want you to go in with us and ask for them to-morrow; we didn't dare to go without you.'

'Oh, I'll soon manage them!' said Ernest; but although he could talk very bravely about it, he rather quaked at the idea of facing those terrible ladies of Cedar Cottage, with whom the children were always getting into trouble, as the gardens of the two houses were divided by a wall—a very low wall, too—which was particularly fascinating to the little Oringtons, as they could easily walk along the top of it, and when they did so, could look right into the sitting-room occupied by the grim sisters. Frank, who was famous for telling fairy tales, used

always to bring in the two Miss Spinkses as wicked old fairies, or ogresses, or something dreadful.

The children were allowed to sit up an hour later than usual on this happy night, and their little tongues went so fast that they had quite tired themselves out when they went to bed.

CHAPTER III.

GOOD CHILDREN AND NAUGHTY CHILDREN.

UR young readers must not suppose that we hold up the little Oringtons as models of good children. They were sometimes very naughty indeed, and as we are going to tell their real history, we must as good historians tell the bad as well as the good. We believe there are some children who always do exactly as they are told, who never make a noise when playing, who sit still when they are required to do so, never speak crossly to each other, never grumble when bed-time comes, never ask for what is not offered them, never speak rudely to the servants, never throw their balls into old maids' gardens, and never do anything that can be called naughty. We say we believe there really are such little human machines to be found somewhere, because we have often read of them in books; but we have never met them, and so we cannot write about them.

But it was not want of training which prevented

Ernest, and Frank, and Violet Orington from being very good children. Although they had lost a father's care, their young mother gave all her time and thoughts to her children, and their grandmother, Mrs. Leslie, might be said to devote herself to them entirely.

Mrs. Leslie was a pretty little woman, still young enough to be often mistaken for the mother of her grandchildren. Her daughter, Mrs. Orington, used to tell her laughingly that she never indulged her own children as she did her grandchildren; but we know that 'grannies' always are indulgent.

On the death of her husband, Mrs. Orington left her country home in Warwickshire, and went to live at Lambton Hall, a very comfortable house, standing in three acres of ground, about ten miles west of London. At the time our story opens, she had lived there about four years, so that Frank and Violet did not remember any other home. The garden was a very great delight to the children. They were forbidden to play in that part of it which was laid out in flower-beds, and we wish we could say they were obedient; but old Sexton the gardener had often to make complaints of them, which he would not have done could he have helped it, for he was very fond of them, and always ready to help them in their games. There was one bit of the garden which was especially their own, which extended from one side

of the house to the low broad wall we have before mentioned. This wall separated Mrs. Orington's garden from the garden of Cedar Cottage, where lived two sisters, Miss Angelina Spinks and Miss Jemima Spinks. Near this wall in the children's garden were two large elm trees, which overhung the Misses Spinks' property. These trees and this wall were the subjects of continual strife. The ladies wrote note after note to Mrs. Orington, begging her to have the trees cut down, because they cast too much shade on their garden, and dripped in wet weather. Mrs. Orington thought that such grand trees, which were probably a hundred years' growth, ought not to be cut down just to please two old ladies. They were not only a pleasure to the little Oringtons and the inmates of Lambton Hall, but they formed part of the landscape of the place, and were, moreover, the homes of many rooks who built there. Mrs. Orington was a very just and thoughtful woman, always anxious to help and be kind to every one; but she did not feel justified in cutting down these two noble trees, and so the two old ladies were annoyed with her. And if the truth must be confessed, they were also angry because she had children, for they hated children, and did not like to hear them playing. They were very neat old ladies, and very prim; and perhaps they would have preferred a world that was peopled only

by neat and prim old maids. But none of us can have the world just as we like it, and so Miss Angelina Spinks and Miss Jemima Spinks were obliged to put up with little children.

The wall was a source of dispute between the children and the old ladies. It belonged to the Lambton Hall property, or it would probably have been made higher. But the children, without caring to inquire whose wall it was, were fond of walking along the top; and the old ladies, knowing they could not prevent it, used to talk *at* them, and make remarks to one another loud enough for the little ones to hear. 'They'll fall down and break their necks some day, and a good thing too,' Miss Jemima would say to Miss Angelina; or, 'I'll have that wall made twenty feet high, to shut out those little nuisances,' Miss Angelina would say. 'Nasty little inquisitive things, prying into our very rooms,' was the remark one day when Frank had told Violet to look at a picture that hung on the wall.

Of course it was not surprising that Frank and Violet after this also talked *at* their neighbours. One day, when they were sitting on the wall with their legs hanging over on the Miss Spinkses' side, Miss Angelina came to the drawing-room window, which opened to the ground, and shouted out to her sister, who was at the piano, singing in a cracked voice a

sentimental song: 'Do come here and look at those audacious little wretches.'

'Oh, there's the ugly Angelina!' said Frank. 'Let us get down, Violet, for her ugly face is enough to frighten any one.'

'Oh, and look at the skinny Jemima coming too,' said Violet. 'Be quick, Frank, or they'll come and eat us up.'

Now it was quite true that Miss Angelina was ugly and Miss Jemima skinny, but Frank and Violet were very naughty to say so in their hearing; and when they told their mother about it, she spoke to them very seriously, and said she thought they ought to give up the pleasure of walking on the wall if it annoyed the old ladies so much; and Frank, instead of saying at once, like all good children, that he would never walk on it again, argued the point with his mother, that as it was her wall, they could do what they liked with it.

'No, Frank,' said Mrs. Orington; 'I can't claim the wall entirely: it is between the two properties, and they have the use of it as well as we.'

'Well,' said Frank conclusively, 'at any rate it ought to belong to you, because you have got children who can walk on it, and they haven't, and of course they can't get on it themselves.'

This bit of logic made both Granny and Mrs. Orington laugh, and so no more was said.

Ernest had been for the last two years at a school in Yorkshire, and Frank and Violet went to a day school for young children in the neighbouring town of Onslow. The school was a mile off, and as there was a railway station both for Lambton and Onslow, they used to walk to school and come back by train, the guard of the train by which they always travelled being asked specially to look after them.

But Frank and Violet, though they were told to be very steady in getting in and out of the train, and to sit still while it went on, were disobedient, and often used to hang out of the window, and open the door for themselves long before the train stopped, and jump out while it was still in motion. The guard felt it was his duty to mention this, and so the naughty children were not allowed to go any more by train, but had to walk in all weathers.

About half a mile from Lambton Hall was a prettily situated house called Rose Bank. This house had just lately been taken by Mrs. Leslie's sister, Mrs. Brooks, and the children counted much on an occasional visit to Uncle and Auntie Brooks and Cousin Popsy. Not that Ernest and Frank cared very much for Uncle Brooks, because he was nearly always in his library, studying, and used to say he did not want to be worried with noisy boys. But he liked to talk to Violet, whom he called a little philosopher, because she asked such curious questions. The Brooks

family had hitherto lived in London, where Mrs. Orington and Mrs. Leslie had been accustomed to visit them frequently; but Mr. Brooks complained that the street noises and organ-men interfered with his studies. He wanted to be within easy reach of London, that he might attend several learned societies of which he was member, but he wanted peace and quietness to pursue his studies. Rose Bank was a quiet nook away from the road that just suited him, and it was especially pleasing to Mrs. Brooks to be so near her sister Mrs. Leslie. Cousin Popsy was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, and was at the time our story begins a very pretty and merry young lady of eighteen. Her father had educated her very carefully, and if she had inherited some of his wisdom, she had also inherited her mother's beauty and charm of manner. Auntie Brooks was one of the happiest and wittiest and prettiest and liveliest women we ever met. She seemed to be always happy herself, and always ready to make everyone else so. You couldn't be miserable with her if you tried. The very look of her was enough to make you in a good temper at once, she seemed so bright and sweet and soft and sunny. She had always a pretty gown and cap, which were a source of great pleasure to Frank; her dark eyes always looked so kindly at you; she spoke so gently to every one; in fact, she was just like the good fairy of the story-books; and when Frank wanted

a good fairy for his tales, he used to describe his auntie, cap and gown and all, to which Violet objected, because she said fairies didn't wear clothes. What a lucky girl we thought Popsy Brooks must be, to have such a mother always to live with. But Popsy had a very great trouble, which she tried to keep all to herself; and so when we said one day to her, that we thought she must be the happiest girl alive, she only smiled sadly. Mrs. Leslie had two sons: one was married and lived in Warwickshire; the other, named Percy, was unmarried and lived in London, for he had a post under Government. As he had no other relations in town, he had been accustomed to visit his aunt very often, and usually spent Sunday with her. But after a time Mr. Brooks made him understand that his visits were not pleasing to him, and so they were given up. The truth was, that Percy Leslie and his cousin were becoming very much attached to one another, and although Mr. Brooks said nothing openly on the subject, he gave many hints that he quite disapproved of cousins marrying.

So when the Brookses came to Rose Bank, Popsy and Percy had scarcely met for a year. Mr. Brooks fancied that his daughter had by this time given up all thoughts of her cousin, as she never mentioned him. He knew more about books than human beings, and he fancied that if two young people were kept apart, they would be sure to

forget each other. He had not married till he was five-and-forty; so that now he was an old man, and had perhaps forgotten his own youth.

Popsy was fond of her father, and would never marry against his wish; so there was little chance of her ever marrying Percy Leslie. This, then, was her great trouble.

She was not christened Popsy, as you may guess; but she was always called by this name by every one but her father. He, being a great Greek scholar, had insisted on having her named Minerva; and as it was quite impossible to turn so grand a word into a pet name, Mrs. Brooks had called her Popsy. There was a bust of Minerva in Mr. Brooks' book-room, and Frank Orington always would teaze his cousin about this and say it was like her. And sometimes he would say, 'You are a Greek statue, Cousin Popsy, and ought to be put up on a stand;' and she would reply, 'What a silly boy you are! as if a Greek statue was ever called Popsy!'

But she was not at all like a statue, for she had a pretty round rosy face, with dimpled cheeks, and bright dark eyes, and curly brown hair, and an expression that was ever changing.

The children at Lambton Hall were delighted at the idea of seeing more of Popsy and Auntie, and were looking forward to their first visit to Rose Bank on the day after Ernest's arrival.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO AUNTIE.

LITTLE Violet slept in her mother's room, and the boys had a large room on the upper floor, where they had their books, and where they had decorated the walls with their favourite coloured pictures from the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News.*

The morning after Ernest's arrival, Mrs. Orington was awakened almost before it was light by much pattering of little feet overhead, and presently as she lay wondering what 'those boys' could be about, the pattering began to come nearer, and then ceased outside her door; and after some whispering there came a gentle tap, and then the door opened a tiny bit, and Ernest's voice said:

'Please, Mudge dear, mayn't we come in? I do so want to talk to you, and we've been awake such ages!'

'Very well, chicks, come along; but you must be very quiet, for I haven't heard Granny moving in her room yet, and we mustn't wake her so early.'

'Oh, Mudge dear,' said Frank, 'Ernie's got two such lovely prizes; and one of them is so big, it's full of pictures, and the other'—

'Stop, stop, Frankie; not so fast. Let Ernie show me his books and tell me all about them himself; and I suppose all that noise I've heard up-stairs was made by you boys unpacking Ernie's trunk, eh?'

'Did we make any noise? I thought we were so quiet; I only fell over twice in tugging at the straps, and Frank upset a chair. But aren't they lovely books, Mother? They were quite the best of the prizes; and I was so glad when I knew I'd got that illustrated *History of Greece*.'

'And did you work hard to get the prize, Ernie?'

'Oh yes, Mudge, of course; but I'm very fond of history, you know, so it wasn't any trouble.'

'But I don't call that working hard, if it gave you no trouble.'

'Oh, don't you, Mudge dear? I do; and then the other is for Latin, and *that* wasn't easy work, anyhow.'

'Well, dear, I'm very pleased you've brought home two prizes, for I know Doctor Small wouldn't have given them unless you deserved to have them. And how about the conduct this time, Ernie?'

'Oh, here's the report, Mother,' and Ernest gave his mother an envelope which contained an account of his progress.

Mrs. Orington glanced down the list, and saw it

was on the whole satisfactory; but when she came to the last item, 'conduct,' she looked grave and said:

'Why, Ernest, how is it that you can't behave better? I really did hope this time to have read "exemplary" against your conduct.'

Ernest looked a little solemn for a moment; but then he looked into his mother's face with his bright eyes full of fun, saying:

'Well, really, Mudge dear, I don't know how it is, but I can't be good. You know, in class sometimes there's one boy who will make me laugh, and I can't do it quietly; and then when the Master asks me what I am laughing about, you see I can't say, because I don't want to get Snooks into trouble; and then I get punished. And then it looks so jolly out of doors, and I watch a bird hopping about in one of the big trees near the window; and then perhaps it's my turn to go on reading, and I can't find my place,' and he began to laugh. 'I can't be *quiet*, Mudge dear; it's no use.'

'Now, Ernest, it's nothing to laugh at; and you must try next term, or I shall be grieved indeed.'

'Why, dear me!' said little Violet, suddenly waking up, 'what are the boys doing here, and whose are those lovely books, and why didn't you wake me up? I really think, Ernie, you might have let me see your prizes, instead of showing them while I was asleep.'

'Well, never mind, Leta dear, look at them now; aren't they jolly?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Violet; 'and I suppose you've been quite a good boy, haven't you?'

'Oh yes,' said Ernest, looking slyly at his mother, who shook her head at him.

'I've got a prize too,' said Violet, 'for sewing; and very hard I've worked, I can tell you; and I pricked my fingers so often, and cried so much over the work, that I'm sure I deserved the prize even if I did it badly.'

Presently they were all seated round the breakfast table, the little ones chattering away, and Granny telling them again and again 'not to talk with their mouths full;' but it was really of no use, for they'd so much to say.

'You must come and see the new station and the flags first thing, Ernie,' said Frank.

'Oh yes; and let's have a game at trains,' said Violet.

'Come along, then,' shouted Ernest, rushing into the lobby; 'bring the flags, Frank, and the whistle.'

'Now, children, wrap yourselves up, it's very cold,' said Granny; 'and don't be rough and make yourselves dirty.'

'We shall be all right, Granny,' said Violet, trotting after her brothers into the garden.

'Oh dear! how wild those children are!' said Mrs.

Leslie; 'I know they'll hurt themselves,' and she looked anxiously from the drawing-room window.

'They're all right, Granny; let them enjoy themselves. You can't expect them to be quiet just as they've all got together again.'

'Well, my dear, I can only say your children are quite unlike anybody else's.'

This was a very favourite argument of Mrs. Leslie's, and her daughter usually replied by saying, 'Really, Granny, I'm very sorry, but I can't help it.'

The little ones were now deeply engaged in 'trains,' Ernest having sufficiently admired the new station at America, and the red and green flags, all of which he pronounced to be 'very jolly.'

When they were called in to be made tidy for dinner, Mrs. Orington told them that they were to pay a visit to 'Auntie Brooks' in the afternoon.

'Oh, that is jolly!' said Ernest; 'and you and Violet haven't been yet either, have you, Frank?'

'No; Mudge said it would be so much nicer for us all to go together, or else Auntie would have had us a week ago.'

When they were dressed, ready to start, they ran into the drawing-room to say good-bye, and Granny said:

'Now be good children, and don't make too much noise, for, you know, Uncle Brooks likes to be quiet;

and, Violet dear, mind you don't spoil that pretty new frock of yours.'

'Oh, bother!' said Violet; 'why need I mind about it? Mudge will get me another if I hurt it.'

'Oh but, Violet, you look so very nice in that dark red velvet, and the white lace tucker makes it so pretty; do try and keep it nice,' said Frank.

'Do you really like it so much, Frank?' said Violet in her little affected way. 'Well, then, I really won't spoil it. I must say I like the colour myself, and it's very warm and comfortable.'

'Come along, children,' said Ernest; 'we shall be late, and I'm in such a hurry to see Auntie Brooks and her new house.'

'Now, mind you're back before it gets dark, dears, and do walk along properly like other children.'

'All right, Granny; I'll take care of them,' said Ernest; and off they all started in high spirits, and very soon reached 'Rose Bank.'

Uncle Brooks was in the drawing-room, and when he saw the children at the gate, he said to his wife:

'Well, my dear, I'll be off to the book-room, and be quiet while the children are about: I can't stand those noisy boys. But Violet may come to me for a little while: she's such an odd little woman, and asks so many quaint questions, that she amuses me; and I'll see the boys for a few minutes before they go.'

'Very well, I'll look after them and amuse them,' and she went into the hall to welcome the little ones, who were delighted to see her, for she was a great favourite with them all.

'Well, and how many prizes have you brought home this time, Ernie?'

'Two, Auntie, for History and Latin.'

'Oh, come, that's well; and how about conduct, Ernest?'

'Same as usual, Auntie.'

'Oh fie, my boy; you're getting quite a little man now, and ought to do better; but there, I daresay you'll be better next time.'

'I've got a prize too,' said Violet.

'Yes, for pricking her fingers and crying,' said Frank.

'Eh, child!' said Auntie; 'what *do* you mean? They never gave prizes for that in my young days.'

'It was for sewing, Auntie. And Frank needn't laugh at me, for it was very hard work indeed; and I hemmed a handkerchief for Mother which she likes very much, though some of the stitches are rather large, and it's a few spots of blood on it.'

'Well, love, you'll do the next more neatly, and it shall be for me, eh?'

'Yes, that it shall,' said Violet.

'And didn't you get any prize, Frank?'

'Only for good conduct, Auntie.'

'Only?' said Mrs. Brooks. 'I think that something to have it for.'

'You see, Frank can keep quiet, Auntie, and I can't; so I shall never get a prize for that,' said Ernest.

'Now you'd like to see the house and garden, wouldn't you, dears?' and she led the way into the drawing-room.

'Oh, isn't this jolly?' said Ernest.

'What pretty blue vases!' said Frank.

'Yes; and don't they look well on that dark red velvet, and with the olive-green background?' said Auntie.

'Oh, I love it,' said little Violet, clapping her hands; 'it's all so pretty, and you've such lots of pictures.'

'And now look into the greenhouse; haven't I made that pretty, and isn't it pleasant to walk into it from the windows of the room?'

'Yes; and I like these windows that are doors,' said Violet.

'They're called French casements, Leta,' said Frank, who had heard his mother speaking of them.

'Oh indeed, Frank! Well, I like them, and I shall have them when I get a house of my own,' said Violet, at which they all laughed.

'And what room does that large window belong to, Auntie?' asked Ernest, pointing to one in a line with the French windows of the drawing-room.

'That's your Uncle's book-room, dear; and a very

pleasant room it is. You must wait to see that, because he's busy reading, and doesn't like a noise, you know. That small door at the end of the greenhouse also opens into his room, so that he can come through it to the drawing-room without crossing the hall.'

'And where's your dining-room, Auntie?' said Frank.

'That's at the back of the house, and also a little room we call Popsy's room.'

'Oh! and where is Cousin Popsy all this time?' asked Ernest.

'She's gone out, dear, to get some things for me; she'll be in presently.'

'What a dirty cap you've got on, Auntie!' said Frank.

'Why, you rude boy, I haven't worn it many times, so it can't be dirty.'

'It is, though, and doesn't look a bit nice. I suppose it's London fog, perhaps, made it dirty. And I've seen you in that gown such a lot of times; why don't you wear something else?'

'Bless me, Frank, you always want every one to be dressed up in all their best clothes; and besides, this is a very handsome dress.'

'But I've seen it so often, Auntie, and I do like people to look nice. I often make Mudge put on all her pretty things of an evening.'

'And it is very silly of her, I think. I'm sure I

wouldn't be bothered with all your nonsense about pretty clothes.'

'That's just my opinion, Auntie. I hate to be bothered about a frock when I want to roll on the rug. Not that dear old Mudge ever says anything; but Granny will keep saying, "Mind your frock, Violet;" "Now don't mess that nice clean pinafore," and it does worry me.'

'And quite right too, my dear; and as to rolling on the rug, well, *I* don't approve of that for little girls.'

'Oh, I love it,' said Violet.

'Now, mayn't we go into the garden?' said Ernest.

'Yes; come along, dears,' and Mrs. Brooks threw a warm fur cloak round her, and they all passed through the greenhouse into the garden.

'We haven't had much done yet, you know, so it's a perfect wilderness.'

'Oh, what a lovely place to play hide-and-seek in!' called out Frank.

'Yes; isn't it? And what great big trees, and how nice it is to have the river just outside the gate!' said Ernest. 'Shall you have a boat on it in the summer, Auntie? Oh do, and I'll come and row you.'

'Drown me, you mean, you wild boy. Fancy trusting myself with you in a boat; why, it would be upset in no time! Now, I'll tell you what we're going to do here. All along the front of the house you see

we're having a terrace walk made, and there will be a row of standard rose trees all along from one end to the other, and a sloping lawn from the terrace to those lime trees that divide us from the road and river; and at the side of the house there'll be a very large lawn, with ornamental trees and flower beds; and behind that bank with shrubs on the top, will be the kitchen garden, but at present it's filled with rubbish, you see.'

'Yes,' said Ernest; 'but oh, what a pity to spoil it for games! All those heaps of rubbish where the long grass has grown over would be such splendid mountains; and that summer-house sort of place all covered with ivy would do for my castle; and we'd go and hunt the bears, and they'd chase us back to the castle, and then we could barricade the door; and one day a bear would catch Violet, and we should have to rescue her.'

'Oh! but I'd rather not, thank you, Ernest. Let the bear catch Frank; he's stronger than me.'

'But then you couldn't help me to rescue him, don't you see, Leta?'

'Well then, I think nobody had better be caught; in fact, Ernest, we won't have any bears; they're not nice playthings, I'm sure,' and so the children ran on, much to Mrs. Brooks' amusement.

'Well now, children, suppose you come in and have some ginger wine and cake, and see old Nurse

Dawson; and then it will be getting time for you to start home again, though Violet is to go in to see her uncle for a little while. But he says you boys shall see his room another day, for he doesn't want to be disturbed; but he'll come into the drawing-room and see you before you start.'

So they all went in and found a little table by the drawing-room fire, covered with cakes and biscuits and oranges and ginger wine; and they managed between them to make the plates look very empty before they had finished; and even Violet, who thought cakes 'nasty things,' seemed rather to enjoy her slice, but then she said it was 'quite different from those she had at home.'

'Now, Violet dear, if you're finished, come with me to your uncle,' and Mrs. Brooks took her through the greenhouse to the small glass door that led to the book-room, and opening it, said:

'Here's Violet, my dear, come to see you for a few minutes. Bring her back to the drawing-room when you've had a chat.'

'Oh, Uncle,' said Violet when she had shaken hands, 'what a nice room! It's prettier than the one in London. Why, you've got a white rug just like Mother has; may I sit on it? I do love these white rugs, they are so soft.'

'Sit just where you like, my child. So you think my room prettier, do you?'

Oh yes; it's so much lighter. And how clean the old lady looks!' pointing to Minerva. 'Why, she must have been washed.'

'Minerva has been cleaned,' said Mr. Brooks with dignity. He was not quite pleased at this allusion to his favourite goddess.

'Well, I'm sure she wanted it; didn't she, Uncle? Why do you have her in your room? Was she any relation to you?'

'She was a Greek goddess, my dear, and you will learn all about her in time.'

'Shall I? But I should like to know about her now. What was her other name? Was she Minerva Brooks, like Cousin Popsy?'

'No, child, no. You wouldn't understand it now if I told you; but you will learn some day. So your holidays have begun, eh?'

'Yes, Uncle; we've got nothing to do all day for four whole weeks but play; isn't it lovely?'

'Too much,' muttered Mr. Brooks, shaking his head.

'And we're going to have such fun, and do such a number of things. And Uncle Percy is coming on Tuesday; and he says he has got such a funny new toy for us—something which will surprise us very much.'

'Oh! your Uncle Percy is coming, is he?'

'Yes; and I'm so glad, because he's going to stay three days, and we are going to ask him to do such

a lot of things for us. But we mustn't make him do too much, Mother says, because it's his holidays as well as ours. We shall bring him to see you, Uncle, because, of course, he'll want to see Cousin Popsy. He's so fond of Popsy! I know he is, and Mother says he is; and I heard Mother tell Granny that she must ask Cousin Popsy to come to our house while he's there.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Brooks rather gruffly.

'Yes, I do love Uncle Percy; he always does everything we ask him. So of course we mustn't keep him right to ourselves all the time, and not let him see Cousin Popsy; for Mother says that would be selfish, because he loves Auntie, and you, and Cousin Popsy very much.'

'Does he?' said Mr. Brooks.

'Oh yes. I believe he loves Cousin Popsy better than Mother; and that's so funny, because I don't think I could like any one better than Ernie and Frankie. But, Uncle,' said Violet, twisting herself round again, and looking at Minerva, 'do tell me why you keep that lady in your room. I can understand a great deal; Mother always tells me about everything.'

'Bless the child,' said Mr. Brooks to himself rather impatiently, and moving towards the door. 'Come along, Violet; we'll go and find Auntie and the boys.'

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHRISTMAS EVE was a very busy day at Lambton Hall. In the kitchen there were all sorts of preparations for cooking; up-stairs there were decorations; the best bedroom was being made ready for Uncle Percy. A big hamper from Warwickshire was standing in the hall waiting to be unpacked; Granny was in the store-room making up parcels of grocery for poor neighbours; and the children were getting in everybody's way. Therefore they were told to amuse themselves for an hour till the little parcels were ready, which they were to carry round to their neighbours. As they could get no one to notice them in the house, they next went to talk to old Sexton the gardener. They told him how they were going to carry the parcels of grocery round to the poor people.

'There's that poor Mrs. Willis, at the end house in Lamb's Lane, in a terrible way with her child dying,' said Sexton. 'I know your Grandma don't

think nothing of her because she drinks, and I've no call to take her part; but I can't a-bear to see the poor woman in that way, and never had her clothes off for three nights. She's taking on that terrible, that it's enough to break your heart to see her. If you would mention it to your Grandma, Master Ernest. Not that I hold with her drinking ways; but when a poor soul's in trouble, we must do what we can. My missus, she offered to sit up last night and let the poor soul rest; but she won't let any one come a-nigh the lad except herself.'

'Oh, poor thing,' said Violet; 'we must go and tell Granny at once.'

But whether led by curiosity or compassion, instead of going to Granny first, the children thought they would go and see the sick boy.

They found the poor little fellow on a miserable-looking bed on the floor in a wretched attic, and evidently dying. The mother sat on the bed holding the child's hand.

'We've come to see poor Tommy,' said Ernest, standing at the top of the rickety stairs.

The staircase was a part of the room, and was not shut off from it in any way. The children, unaccustomed to so much squalor and misery, held back, as if frightened to go into the midst of it.

Mrs. Willis was such a drunkard that she seldom received any help or sympathy from her richer

Tommy with the fever.

neighbours; so she was surprised to see the little Oringtons.

'Thank you, young gentleman,' she said, crying very much; 'but don't stay here, because he has the fever.'

'I'll tell my mother about it,' said Ernest, 'and she'll send you something.'

'I'm afraid he's past help now,' sobbed the woman.

When the children returned and told their grandmother, her anxiety may be imagined.

'Oh, you dreadful children!' she said; 'whatever are we to do? You'll all get the fever, and perhaps die; whatever are we to do? Where's your mother?'

'Don't be so terrified, Granny,' said Violet; 'you are always so terrified. We shall be all right, you will see.'

'Annie, my dear,' said Mrs. Leslie to her daughter, 'whatever can we do? These children have been to see Tommy Willis, who is dying of fever. We shall have them all ill; what can we do to disinfect them?'

'We shan't hurt, shall we, Mudge dear? Nothing ever hurts us,' said Violet.

'I hope not, Violet,' said Mrs. Orington; 'but I think you were all very naughty to go to Lamb's Lane without asking us. I have told you before that some of those houses are very unhealthy, because the people who live in them won't keep them

clean. I suppose, Granny,' she continued, turning to her mother, 'if they keep out in the open air all day, and run about to keep the circulation up, they may not come to any harm.'

'I think,' said Granny, 'that they ought all to take a dose of senna.'

If there was a medicine they hated, it was senna, especially Violet; so they all looked at one another with very long faces. They had counted on Christmas Eve being a day without any troubles, and little thought that they would have to commence with a dose of the hateful medicine.

'At any rate, it can do no harm,' said their mother.

'And I think,' said Granny, who had some old-fashioned ideas, 'I will sew some camphor into their under linen, and make them change everything they have on, and not wear those clothes again till they have been thoroughly cleansed. And I think a warm bath would be a good thing. We cannot be too cautious.'

'A tepid bath would be best, I think, Granny, as they are used to cold water. If they have a warm bath, they will not be able to go out for some little time, and fresh air will do them the most good.'

'How tiresome you are, you naughty children, hindering us when there is so much to do! And now I must send Sexton round with the parcels, and

he's got quite enough to do without. Now come first and have the bath.'

Violet set up what might be termed a howl. She declared she wasn't going to take the nasty medicine, and be washed and dressed over again. Frank began to cry too, and Ernest tried very hard to keep the tears back, and felt as if he had a lump in his throat. He thought it was beneath his dignity to cry, and that he must set a good example to Frank and Violet; but still it was very hard to be disappointed in all their plans, for they had counted on such a happy day. Granny let them cry for some time, because she thought it would perhaps be a lesson to them not to go anywhere without permission.

'You naughty, wicked children,' said Granny; 'you wanted to give your poor granny and mother all the trouble of nursing you through a fever.'

'Boo-oo-oo, we didn't!' cried Frank. 'I'm sure we didn't.'

'We only wanted to see Tommy, because he was so ill,' said Ernest, and then he burst into tears, for he could hold out no longer.

'You're an unkind granny, and I won't love you, and I shall never be happy any more,' said Violet, and then she howled and screamed louder than ever.

'Oh, Violet, don't!' said Mrs. Orington, putting

her hands to her ears. 'You deafen me; you'll frighten me out of the house.'

'Mother will go away and leave you,' said Granny.

'She shan't,' shrieked Violet, and all three children rushed to their mother.

Now Mrs. Orington, who was a very clever woman, was saying to herself that in case the children had done any harm in going to see a fever patient, it was at any rate the worst thing they could do to cry and get low spirited. So she said :

'Now, children, listen to me. Go and have your bath and change your clothes, and instead of senna you shall have sal-volatile, and you must take some other medicine to-night. Then you shall go down to Rose Bank with a message to Popsy to ask her to come to tea with you this evening; after that you shall go and meet Uncle Percy at the station; and then you shall all stay up till after the late dinner, and have snap-dragon. But remember, this is only if you are good.'

'Oh, how lovely!' said Violet, jumping and clapping her hands, with the tears yet on her cheeks.

'Come along,' said Ernest; 'let's get washed and dressed,' and he began unbuttoning his jacket as he rushed up-stairs.

The bathing and dressing were soon done, and the three little people came down smelling very strongly of camphor.

After dinner, they went to Rose Bank to ask Popsy to come to tea.

'Why, Ernie, how you've grown!' said Popsy, for she had not seen him since his return from school. 'Of course I'll come to tea; and what fun snap-dragon will be, won't it? I wonder who'll get the most plums. I don't think Violet will; she'll be frightened of it.'

'I don't think I shall,' said Violet; 'and if I am, I'll make Uncle Percy get some for me.'

'Uncle Percy!' said Popsy, colouring; 'is he at Lambton Hall?'

'No; he's coming this afternoon,' replied Violet. 'We're going to meet him. I told Uncle he was coming when we were here on Tuesday, you know.'

'Yes,' said Popsy; 'and what did he say?'

'Say? Why—he said—oh! I can't think what he said—I forget—but never mind that. It'll be such fun to-night, you know; won't it? And Mother says I may pour out the tea. You'll be my visitor, and'—

At this moment Aunt Brooks came in, and there was a general rush to kiss her.

'Cousin Popsy's coming to tea with us to-night,' said Frank; 'and then I suppose she'll dine with Mother after. But I don't think she'll be able to eat any dinner, because we are to have the most splendid tea, Granny says; and then we are to sit up to'—

Poor Popsy's face was quite red, for her mother was looking at her inquiringly, to see if she were really going.

'Am I to go?' she asked, not waiting to hear the rest of the delights that Frank was recounting.

Mrs. Brooks looked puzzled. She wished her daughter to enjoy herself, but at the same time she knew how strongly Mr. Brooks objected to her meeting her cousin Percy.

'I don't see why you shouldn't, my dear,' said Mrs. Brooks; 'but suppose we just mention the matter to Papa,' and she left the room.

Popsy's heart failed her, the colour left her face, and she looked quite white. It was long now since she had seen Percy, and until the children mentioned him she had no idea that he was to spend Christmas at Lambton; for although her father had told her mother, and in fact her mother had heard it from Mrs. Leslie, yet she had not told Popsy, because she considered it wiser to be silent on the subject. In fact, she avoided speaking of Percy at all to her daughter, because she knew that it made her unhappy. Mrs. Brooks presently came back again, followed by her husband.

'Well, boys,' said Uncle Brooks; 'so you're having your holidays, are you? I hope you are good, and don't waste your time in running about and getting into mischief, but sit down for a few hours a-day

and look over what you've learnt during the term, so that you may not forget it?'

As neither of them had opened a book since the holidays commenced, they hung down their heads and looked rather foolish.

'There are too many holidays in these days,' Mr. Brooks went on, 'and too much indulgence. In my time it was hard work, and little food, and plenty of birch rod' (Frank thought to himself how glad he was he didn't live in those times); 'and we had no fires to warm us, but had to run to keep ourselves warm. I understand you are now going to a boys' school, Frank, and that you are to begin Latin and Greek; and quite time you did, too, for a big boy of your age ought not to be coddled up amongst the women. And now I suppose you are expecting Christmas presents from every one' (the two boys tried to look as if they expected nothing). 'There was no nonsense of that kind when I was a boy; but children are spoilt in these days. So here is my present to you, Ernest—a very excellent edition of *Virgil*, which I hope you will soon be able to read with fluency, and understand with benefit to yourself; and to you, Frank, I present this *History of Rome*, which I hope you will peruse in your leisure hours.'

Ernest and Frank took their books, and tried to appear very grateful.

'Aren't you going to give me a present too, Uncle?' said Violet.

There was no one who dared to be so familiar with Mr. Brooks as little Violet.

'Yes, my child; Auntie's got a new doll ready for you.'

Violet had rather a contempt for dolls; still she rather liked the excitement of having a *new* one, so she begged her aunt to let her see it.

The doll was brought; she was a very large young lady, with fine clothes that would take off.

'Oh, that's very nice!' said Violet when she had seen all the mysteries of its dress. 'I shall call it Minerva Brooks, after the lady in Uncle's book-room; and we must have the christening this afternoon before tea; and you'll be godmother, Cousin Popsy, won't you?'

Popsy looked up at her father.

'I cannot spare you this evening, my dear,' her father said. 'I have arranged for you to read with me an exceedingly useful and learned article on "The Antiquity of Christmas as a Festival."'

The children all looked horrified. Those long words, whatever they might mean, sounded so very disagreeable, and suggested something very different from snap-dragon. But not even Violet dare say anything, for Mr. Brooks' voice and manner were so solemn as he said this that the children were frightened.

Mr. Brooks having delivered this speech, walked majestically out of the room. The children all began lamenting to Auntie that Popsy wouldn't come. Mightn't she come to the station, they urged, to meet Uncle Percy? But Auntie said Papa wanted her, and she must do as he wished. Then Auntie produced her presents, which consoled them a little for the disappointment, for she gave Ernest three bright new half-crowns, Frank two, and Violet one.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE PERCY.

THE children fortunately did not take the fever, and Christmas passed very merrily for every one except Popsy. She could not help wishing she might join in the fun of snap-dragon, instead of reading with her father; but she did not complain, and even tried to prevent her mother from finding out that she was unhappy. She put on a cheerful face, and went about all her little household duties the same as usual; but all the time she was thinking how near her cousin Percy was to her, and how hard it was that she might not see him. She fancied that perhaps he might consider it his duty to make a polite call on his uncle and aunt, and then she would at least see him, though she would have little chance of saying much to him. But the three days slipped away, and Percy returned to town without having caught sight of Popsy. She began almost to blame him. If he really cared to see her, he might have found

an excuse for calling, she thought, and it was cowardly of him not to dare to face her father. She would try and forget all about him, as he had evidently forgotten her.

While blaming him in this way, she little thought how anxious he had been to come, and what were his motives for not doing so. He knew how obedient she was to her father's will, and how impossible it would be to make her do anything against it; he knew also from his uncle's own lips that permission for Popsy to marry him would never be given. He felt, then, how hopeless it was, and thought that both for her sake and his own it were best they should never meet. So while he played all manner of games with the little Oringtons, and seemed to be so cheerful and happy, he was very sad at heart.

Although he had determined not to go to Rose Bank, he could not help wishing Popsy would come to Lambton Hall during his stay, or that he might perchance meet her when out walking. And when the time went by and she did not come, he could not help thinking that if she had wished very much to see him, she would have found some excuse for doing so; and he decided that perhaps she had begun to forget him. Thus each was blaming the other.

Of course it did not escape little Violet's notice that her uncle had not been round to Rose Bank.

She was in the highest state of excitement about showing Popsy and Auntie Brooks her new toy which Percy had brought. It was an immense toad, which, containing clockwork inside, would hop about the carpet when it was wound up. The great fun of the thing was to wind the toad up ready to hop, and then put it in its box, which was so arranged that the moment you opened the lid, the side of the box dropped, and the toad jumped out. To any one unprepared for this, it was rather startling; but when you knew all about it, of course you were not surprised.

Now Violet had had the pleasure of startling all the inmates of the house one after another, just as Uncle Percy had startled her with it at first. First there was Granny. Violet had placed the box on the large table in the dining-room, and asked Granny in the most innocent manner just to open that box and see what Uncle Percy had brought. When Granny opened it, quite unsuspiciously, and the toad came jumping out, she quite shrieked and ran away. Then Mrs. Orington was made to open it; then the servants were brought up one by one; then the cat, to look at this animal jumping about the floor; and then it was taken out to old Sexton to be exhibited, and he said 'he'd seen a many toads in his time, and useful things they was too for eating up the grubs and such-like, but he never

see a toad as big as that toad, and he guessed it wouldn't be much use in the garden.' A playmate who lived near, named Ted Wilberforce, had also been made 'just to open that little box,' and had immediately decided that his mother must buy him a toad, for he could always get all he asked for.

But on the evening of the last day of Uncle Percy's visit, when the toad had been made to hop over every room in the house, and shown to every one within reach, Violet and the boys had begun to long for some one else to startle. If only Popsy would come in, or Auntie! Oh, how Auntie would scream! Violet was sure she would. The effect on Uncle Brooks was not calculated, as he was much too solemn a gentleman to try any jokes with. Violet was sitting on the rug in the drawing-room, as she usually did in that interval between the children's tea and the late dinner. The two boys had both squeezed into one of the big easy-chairs, and Uncle Percy was resting on the sofa after his labours with the children.

Granny and Mother were dressing for dinner.

'Oh, Uncle Percy,' said Violet, 'do you think Cousin Popsy will come in this evening with Auntie? I do so want to show them the toad. Why don't they come? We must send Cousin Popsy out of the room while we show it to Auntie, mustn't we,

so that she doesn't know? Oh dear, I do wish they'd come!'

Uncle Percy wished so too, but did not say so.

'Do you think there is any chance of their coming?' said Violet.

'I don't know,' said Uncle Percy.

'It's that nasty old Uncle Brooks makes Cousin Popsy do all sorts of dreadful lessons,' said Frank, 'and he won't give her any holidays.'

'You mustn't speak like that of your uncle,' said Uncle Percy.

'Well, you don't think him nice, do you, Uncle Percy?' asked Frank, who was always inclined to argue.

'Of course I do,' said Percy.

'Now, Uncle,' said Frank, 'I'm sure you are not telling the truth; and Mother says, whatever happens, we must speak the truth and never hide anything.'

'I think Uncle Brooks a very clever man, and of course clever people must be nice.'

'Yes,' argued Frank; 'but he's not nice to you, because I heard Mother say he wasn't. I heard her tell Granny you wouldn't go over to Rose Bank because of him.'

'Well, I like Uncle Brooks,' said Violet; 'he's very kind to me, and gave me that funny old doll.' She had already got tired of her new doll, and had cast it on one side for the toad.

'You don't seem to care for the doll, though,' said Ernest; 'and I'm sure I don't care for my book. I like Auntie's present, though; and I do love Auntie, and Cousin Popsy too. I'm sure you love Auntie and Cousin Popsy better than Uncle; don't you, Uncle Percy?'

'It is very natural I should, Ernie,' he answered.

'And you love Cousin Popsy best of all, don't you, Uncle?' said Violet.

'Yes; I love my cousin very much.'

'Now tell me, Uncle Percy,' she said, climbing up on him,—'tell me true, you know, quite true,—which do you love best, Cousin Popsy or me?'

'Oh, you silly little Violet, to ask such questions! How am I to know which I love best?'

'Well, I believe you love Cousin Popsy best of any one—better even than Granny or Mother; now, don't you?'

'Don't talk nonsense, little one,' said Uncle. 'Come and have a game of ride-a-cock-horse.'

Violet was quite ready for ride-a-cock-horse with Uncle Percy, who she declared was a better horse than any one—an appreciation which she showed by working the horse very hard indeed; for she never got tired, but kept saying, 'Go on, go on,' till Uncle Percy's legs ached very much indeed.

But the ride-a-cock-horse did not make her forget the conversation, and some little time after Uncle

Percy left, and Auntie and Cousin Popsy had both been startled in due course with the toad, and had both shrieked very much, to the delight of the children, Violet said:

'Why didn't you come while Uncle Percy was with us, Cousin Popsy?'

'Papa couldn't spare me, dear.'

'Oh, that's a pity, because Uncle Percy wanted to see you so much—I know he did, because, you know, he likes you.'

'Does he?'

'Ever so much. I asked him which he loved best, you or me; and I told him to tell me very true, and he wouldn't answer, and of course it was you; and I told him I knew he loved you better than Mother or Granny, which I don't think he ought, because I'm sure I don't love you better than Mother and Granny and Ernie and Frank, though I love you very, very much; but you are only my cousin.'

'You little chatterer! what else have you got to say?'

So after this Popsy thought to herself that perhaps Percy did think about her, and she gave Violet a hug and a kiss, and said she was a funny little thing.

The Christmas holidays passed only too quickly to the children, though perhaps their elders thought them rather long, and the time for going back to

school was drawing near. There were other adventures besides those we have related, and plenty of fun, and sometimes a little trouble, such as doses of senna, and rain coming when it wasn't wanted, and clothes soiled, and scoldings from Granny; but we cannot write of all that happened at this time, because we have a great deal more to tell. One incident, however, must not be forgotten, because it introduces a young gentleman who plays a considerable part in our story, and who must have a fresh chapter to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

TED WILBERFORCE.

SOME little distance from Lambton Hall, and on the other side of Cedar Cottage, stood a pleasant house called Castlemans, belonging to a family of the name of Wilberforce. There was one boy, Ted, a few years older than Ernest, who also went to school in the north of England, and who was therefore only at home during holidays; and the children had sometimes seen him looking in at the gate rather longingly, for he had no one of his own age with whom to play, and so he occasionally found the time rather long.

One day while Ernest, Frank, and Violet were playing together, they saw Ted Wilberforce watching them, and presently he called out:

'What a jolly game you're *all* having! I should so like to join in. I haven't any one to play with at home, and it's so slow, don't you know?'

'All right,' said Ernest, 'we shall be very glad; but we'll just ask Mother, though I'm sure she won't

mind. She knows who you are,' and off he ran to ask Mrs. Orington if Ted might come into the garden and play with them.

'Yes, my boy; I've no objection so long as you don't get into mischief. There, be off with you!'

'Really, my dear, do you think it quite wise to allow a strange boy to come in and play with your children? You know nothing of the Wilberforces,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Well, Mother, I can see at a glance young Ted Wilberforce is a little gentleman, and that's quite enough for me.'

'You know best, of course, my dear; but I consider it rather a risk.'

'I'll have a little talk with him presently, and if I think there's any harm in the boy, I shall not let him come again.'

Meanwhile Ernest had rushed off to the gate, and the four young people were chattering away as fast as possible.

'How old are you?' asked Frank of the newcomer.

'Just thirteen,' said Wilberforce.

'Oh, that *is* old. I'm only six, you know, and my name's Violet,' said that young lady. 'Don't you think it's rather a pretty name?'

'Yes; I like it very much. Mine's Ted.'

'Why, what a small name, and you're so big!'

'Well, it's short for Edward, you know; that's really my name.'

'Ah, I understand; I'm called Leta, and that's the short of Violet.'

'What were you playing at?' asked Ted.

'Well, we weren't really playing at anything, we were just rushing about to keep warm; and then we were going to paint our little room,' said Ernest.

'You know there's a little room by the stable buildings, where we keep our wheelbarrow and our rakes and spades and things,' said Frank; 'and we heard Mother saying the other day that in the spring she would have it whitewashed and made nice for us'—

'And, don't you see, we thought it would be so jolly to do it now ourselves and surprise Mudge!' said Ernest.

'But who's Mudge?' asked Wilberforce.

'Why, Mother, of course,' said Violet; 'we call her Mudge, Mudgy, and Mudgems.'

'How funny! I don't think my mamma would like that.'

'Oh, but ours *does* very much indeed,' said Violet.

'Yes, I daresay,' said Wilberforce in rather a doubtful tone. 'And now, where are you going to get your paint or whitewash from?'

'Oh, I'll tell you,' said Ernest; 'you come with us to our room and you shall see.'

So they all ran round to the stables, and Ernest led the way into a little shed with a window and a bench standing under it.

'That's where we do our carpenter's work, you know,' he said, pointing to the bench; 'and these are all our things, and that's my tool-box.'

'This is jolly,' said Wilberforce, looking round; 'and what are you going to do with this old sauce-pan and frying-pan?'

'Oh, we found these in the loft, and we thought they'd do splendidly for the paint pots,' said Frank.

'And have you any brushes?'

'Yes; I found these in the kitchen. This one I've seen Granny use for putting egg on the top of her pies, you know; and this little mop is used for cleaning out jugs. Don't you think we shall manage very well?' said Ernest.

'Jolly, I think; but you haven't told me about the paint yet,' said Wilberforce.

'Ah, now you shall see,' and Ernest drew from his pocket a screw of paper which contained a lump of whitening.

'And look here,' said Frank, diving into his knickerbockers and producing a bit of brick dust; 'won't that be nice?'

'Yes, very,' said Wilberforce; 'but do you think they'll mix well?'

'Why not?' they all said.

'Oh, I don't know, but I thought perhaps they wouldn't.'

Violet, who had been fumbling in her pocket for some time, suddenly said 'There!' in a triumphant tone.

'What is it?'

'Where did you get it from?' they all shouted.

'It looks like a screw of blue flannel,' said Wilberforce.

'It *is* blue,' said Violet.

'So I see; but what's the good of it?' said Ernest.

'Silly stupids!' said Violet in great contempt; 'if you squeeze it into your paint, you'll make that blue. It's what cook uses in the wash-house, and I took it off the shelf.'

'Oh, how splendid!' cried the boys. 'Leta, you are a brick!'

'Yes, of course I am,' said Violet in a superior tone, as much as to say, 'I know more than all you boys put together.'

'Now for the water,' said Wilberforce; 'and let's pound up the things,' and they all began pounding away with stones at the whitening and brick dust, and soon it was ground up quite small.

'Now,' said Ernest, 'I've filled the saucepan with water; put in the brick dust first, Frank.'

'Why, it all floats on the top,' said Wilberforce. 'We must stir it well with this stick.'

Mixing the whitewash.

'Never mind; put the whitening in. There, that's better. Now, Leta, for your blue!'

Violet went to the saucepan, and putting her little hand well into it, she squeezed very hard at her bit of blue flannel; and gradually the wash became of a light blue tint, and then the boys shouted with delight.

'Now, let's begin!' and there was a rush for the brush and little mop, which were at last secured by Ernest and Wilberforce.

'I think I ought to have it first,' said Violet.

'You shall have it after me, Leta,' said Ernest.

'Well, I got the blue, and I'm a girl.'

Here Wilberforce gallantly gave up his mop to Violet, and she and Ernest began most vigorously to dip into the saucepan and splash at the walls and at themselves, for almost as much of the wash seemed to get on to them as the walls.

'Oh, Leta,' said Frank, 'you're wiping your hands on your frock! Give me the brush now.'

'Bother!' said Violet; 'what a nuisance clothes are! I wish we were like Adam and Eve; it would be so much less trouble.'

'It would be very cold just now,' said Wilberforce.

'Don't the walls begin to look clean and nice?' said Ernest.

'Yes; but aren't we making rather a mess on the floor?'

'Well, never mind that, Frank,' said Violet.

They continued taking turns with the brush and mop until they'd finished the little shed, dragging the bench round so as to reach the upper part of the walls. It must be confessed that the effect was not very brilliant, being decidedly blotchy; and as they filled the brush very full of wash, it ran down the walls in little streams, and trickled across the floor; and as the little ones were continually trotting about, the state of things can be imagined. While they were still admiring the result of their morning's work, they heard the bell for dinner, and rushed off to the house.

'Good-bye, Wilberforce,' said Violet; 'you'll come again soon, won't you?'

'Oh yes, if I may. We've had a jolly time.'

'Good-bye all.'

'Good-bye,' they all shouted.

'Well, I hope we shan't meet Granny till we're brushed up ready for dinner. We are in a state; and you're worse than any of us, Leta,' said Ernest.

'I can't help it, and I'm sure you and Frank are just as bad.'

'Why, you must have brushed against the wall as we came out, Leta, for you've a big smear right across the skirt of your frock behind.'

'Don't worry, Frank; I shan't let Granny see my back.'

But, alas! as they ran across the lobby, they came upon Granny leaving the drawing-room.

She threw up her hands and almost screamed.

'Goodness gracious me! You bad, wicked, dreadful children, where have you been? what have you been doing? Here, Annie, come and look at your three children.'

Mrs. Orington came, and could scarcely help laughing at the absurd appearance of the little ones; but she made an effort to look severe.

'Did you ever see anything so disgraceful?' said Granny.

'Now, children, what have you been doing?'

'Why, this is the effect of having that horrid boy to play with, Annie. You ought not to have allowed it.'

'One moment, Granny; let me hear from them what has happened,' said Mrs. Orington. 'Now, Ernest, come and tell me how you all got into this dreadful condition.'

'Why, please, Mother, we heard you say you would have our little room by the stables made clean and nice for us in the spring, and we thought you'd be so pleased if we did it all ourselves; and we wanted to surprise you, and we've done it.'

'But where did you get the whitewash, or blue-wash I suppose it was, for you're all splashed with blue from head to foot?'

Between them all they told how they had got the various things, and great was Mrs. Leslie's horror when she heard the use to which her pastry brush had been put.

'Bad, wicked children,' she said again and again, 'you'll drive us all out of the house with your horrible tricks.'

'Another time, children, when you want to do anything, come and ask me first; and don't try any more surprises, please, for they're not pleasant. I had intended taking you to town with me this afternoon, and letting you spend your Christmas money; but now I must punish you by leaving you at home.'

'And your mother will most likely never come back from town to such wicked children,' said Granny. 'Now go and get clean, if it's possible, and come to dinner.'

They all looked very tearful, and went slowly across the lobby; and just as they were disappearing, Mrs. Leslie said to her daughter:

'I know it's all that horrid boy, Annie.'

'He isn't horrid,' said little Violet, turning round.

'Yes, he is,' said Granny.

'He isn't; he's *beautiful*,' said Violet, stamping her little foot.

'I don't think you can see anything beautiful about Wilberforce, Violet; he might be tolerable

if his face wasn't covered with freckles,' said Ernest.

'I *love* freckles,' said Violet.

'Go away, you naughty child, and get washed,' said Granny. 'There never were such dreadful children.'

At dinner they all begged very hard to be taken to town; but Mrs. Orington would not alter her decision, and they followed her sorrowfully to the gates to say good-bye.

'But you won't stay away, Mudge? you will come back to us, won't you?' said Violet.

'No; I won't stay this time. I'll come back to tea,' said Mrs. Orington, looking back and smiling. 'Now do try and be good chicks, and don't worry Granny while I'm away.'

'No, Mudge dear; and we will be good *always*,' they all shouted, and then they stood kissing their hands to 'dear Mudge' as long as they could see her.

They went in and kissed Granny, and asked to be forgiven, and were so good that when their mother came home in the evening, Granny said:

'They've been such darlings, as good as can be.'

And after tea, they got 'Mudge' to play and sing to them till bed-time, and were as happy as possible, quite forgetting their trouble of the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW-COMER.

ERNEST Orington and Edward Wilberforce both went back to school, and Frank and Violet were left to play together. Not that they found very much time for playing, except on half-holidays; for they had to walk into Onslow every morning to school and return to dinner, and go back again in the afternoon and return to tea. This took up a good deal of their time, and also tired them out, so that they were glad to rest in the evening. Frank was now placed at a boys' school, where he was the youngest boy; so he used to take his sister to school first, and then go on to his own school, and call for her in returning.

Thus they went on day after day, till Easter, when they had a short holiday.

Ernest spent his Easter with relations in the north, and the children missed him very much.

The spring went by, and the long summer days came, and then Violet and her brother began to count on Ernest's return.

'How long is it now, Mudge dear, before Ernest comes?' said Violet one day for about the twentieth time.

She was always asking the question now.

'I told you yesterday, Leta, that it's three weeks.'

'Oh! I thought it was ever so long ago that you said three weeks. How many days are there in three weeks?'

'Twenty-one. But before Ernie comes, somebody else is coming.'

'Somebody else!' exclaimed Frank and Violet. 'Oh! do tell us who it is. Is it Uncle Percy?'

'No; I don't mean any one to stay with us, but somebody to live with us.'

'Oh, Mudge darling, who can it be?' said Frank. 'Is it a grown-up person or a child? Is it some one who will play with us?'

'Or is it a doggie, Mudge? Yes, I'm sure it's a doggie; now, isn't it? I do so want a dog!'

'No, Violet; it isn't a dog, but a girl.'

'Oh dear, I *am* disappointed!' said Violet. 'I *did* think it was a dog, and I do love a dog.'

'But, Violet love, won't you like to have a girl to play with you?'

'I don't know, Mudge; I've never had any girls to play with, and I like boys,' she said petulantly.

'What sort of a girl?' asked Frank, who seemed interested; 'a big or little one?'

'She is about the same age as Ernie; but as I have never seen her, I can say nothing about size,' said Mrs. Orington.

'And is she really coming to live with us altogether?' asked Frank.

'Yes, altogether.'

'But who is she?' said Frank.

'She's a distant relation of ours; and the poor little thing has no father and mother to take care of her.'

'Poor thing!' said Frank; and then he added in rather a patronizing little tone, 'We must be kind to her.'

'I suppose we must,' said Violet grandly.

'I don't think you need be so grand about it, either of you,' said Mrs. Orington; 'for she's a good deal older than you, and would be able to take her own part, I should think.'

'Yes, Mudge,' said Violet, who did not quite like the idea of another girl in the household, and especially one so much older than herself; for the truth is, Violet was accustomed to be made much of by her brothers, and to claim a good deal because she was a girl. 'But, of course, she'll be rather shy at first; don't you think so?'

'And what's her name?' said Frank.

'Amy Gray.'

'I call that a very pretty little name; don't you Violet?'

'Not so pretty as mine,' answered that young lady rather proudly.

'I wonder whether she's pretty,' said Frank. 'If she's related to you, Mudge, she must be!'

'Nonsense, child! I wonder whether she's good—that's the chief thing. Her mother was very good and very pretty; but she married a poor man, and her uncle, who brought her up, never forgave her, and would never speak to her again.'

'Then what did she do?' said Frank. 'Did she starve?'

'I fear she suffered a great deal; but I never heard anything about her, because she went away with her husband, and died when her little girl was born. The husband also died a few years after, and then his friends put the child in an orphan school.'

'An orphan school! Oh, what's that?' said Violet.

'A school where they take care of poor little children who have no father and mother.'

'And what do they do to them?'

'Do to them, you silly child? Why, teach them, of course, and clothe them, and take care of them altogether.'

'And doesn't anybody pay for them?' said Frank.

'No; rich people give money to the school.'

'And why are you going to take her away from school?' asked Frank.

'Because, darling, her mother's old uncle, that was so cruel to her, has just died and left his money divided amongst his relations, all except this poor little girl. He has not left her a penny; but to me he has left a legacy, which is to be divided amongst you chicks when I die.'

'But you are not going to die, Mudge?' said Violet in a fright.

'I hope not yet, my child, because I have you to take care of. I do not think it right to use this money for myself, while that poor girl to whom it really belongs is in want. I wrote to the rest of her relations, to whom the money is left, to ask if they would not each give up a little for her use, but they will not.'

'What unkind people!' said Frank.

'So I am going to devote my share to her, and have her away from the orphan school.'

'What relation is she to us, Mother?'

'Her mother was your father's second cousin; so you are cousins of some sort, and you must call her cousin.'

'When is she coming?' asked Violet.

'Directly I can arrange a day to fetch her from the orphan school; and if you are good children—very good, mind—I will take you with me.'

'Oh, that's delightful!' said Violet, clapping her hands, and forgetting in the excitement of a pro-

mised treat her ill-will towards the new cousin that was to invade her home.

Frank was a very imaginative child, and during the rest of the day his mind kept running on the history of the poor lady and the orphan child. He surrounded the girl with a halo of romance, and made up quite a story about her. In the evening, after tea, he and Violet were perched up in their favourite elm tree, where they had a good view of Miss Angelina and Miss Jemima Spinks, who were both sitting under the verandah knitting. Miss Angelina required spectacles for her work, and every now and then she looked up grimly over her glasses at the children, and muttered some remark to her sister.

It was a warm July evening, much too warm for romping, and Violet leant against Frank's shoulder and said in a languid manner :

'It's really too warm to do anything, Frank ; so suppose you tell me a story. I don't want a story with anything dreadful in it to-day ; I feel inclined to hear about something very nice and beautiful.'

'If you want a story, Violet, you must have just what I've got to tell, because I can't make it just as you like, you know.'

'But you know you can tell any sort of story, Frank, and I want a very nice one.'

'Well, Violet, if I tell one, you must promise not

to interrupt, because sometimes you quite put me out by wanting it all to go your way.'

'Very well, Frank; I promise.'

'Once upon a time'—

'Oh! you always begin like that, Frank, and I'm tired of it.'

'Well, really, Leta dear, what shall I begin with? In days of old, a very long time ago'—

'Yes; that's better, Frank. Now go on.'

'In days of old, a very long time ago, there was a very beautiful princess, and she always wore pretty dresses, just like Mudge; but she was very unhappy, because'—

'Well, if she wore pretty dresses and was like Mudge, I don't see why she was unhappy, Frank.'

'If you're not quiet, Leta, I shall not *recede*,' said Frank, who was fond of using long words, and often miscalled them. Of course, he meant to say *proceed*.

'Oh, very well, Frank; go on.'

'As I was saying when you stopped me, she was very unhappy, because she had no father or mother; she was an orphan, and she lived with her granny, who was very unkind to her because she was poor. Her granny had lots of money, but she never let the princess have any, and always said a great many very disagreeable things when she gave her a new dress; so she used to cry very often when she was alone. There was a very beautiful garden round

the palace where her granny lived, and she often walked about nearly all day, thinking and crying'—

'Didn't she spoil her pretty dresses with so much crying, Frank?' said Violet rather slyly; 'and did she use the corners of her pinafore to wipe her eyes with?'

'Pinafores indeed! As if my beautiful princess wore pinafores!'

'Well, I daresay she did when she was a little girl, Frank; but do go on.'

'The garden was very beautiful, and had great trees in it, like Ashley Woods, you know, and beautiful roses of every colour, and birds that were always singing, and doggies'—

'Oh, shouldn't I like to have had a romp with the doggies, Frank! wouldn't you? and didn't the princess often play with them, and love them very much?' said Violet.

'Yes, Leta, very much; and there was one great big black curly fellow, much bigger than you, and she loved him very much indeed.'

'Now I'm sure you're wrong, Frank. A princess wouldn't like a great big black dog like that; she'd have a white soft silky one, I know, with long ears, like I'm so fond of.'

'I tell you it was a big black fellow, Leta; just as if *I* didn't know! She's *my* princess; I won't tell you any more about her if you aren't quiet.'

'Oh, very well, Frank; only I do think you might make my kind of doggie.'

'One beautiful summer's day the princess was very sad; for her granny had given her a new dress, and had grumbled and told her she cost more money than she was worth.'

'Nasty stingy old thing! I wouldn't have had the old dress; I'd have thrown it at her,' said Violet.

'The princess couldn't be so rude, you know; but she went out into the garden to her favourite walk far away from the palace, where the grass was very soft and dotted all about with daisies, and there were a lot of trees and a stone pedestal like we've got, with a big vase of flowers on it; and she took off her hat, and walked about under the trees, thinking how she wished she'd some money, and could go away and live somewhere else.

'Suddenly there appeared before her a little old man, very bald, with only just a little white hair round the back of his head, and he stooped very much and looked ever so old, and he was a fairy'—

'Stuff and nonsense, Frank. Who ever heard of a man-fairy? Why, you silly stupid, they're always lovely ladies with lots of thin, soft, pink-and-white petticoats, and a silver star on their heads, and a wand in their hands, like that doll on the Christmas tree at Auntie Brooks', you know.'

'That's not my sort of fairy, Leta. I have my sort

The princess and the fairy.

of fairy, and my sort of doggie; and if you don't like them, I shan't tell you any more.'

'Oh yes, Frank dear, please do; I want to hear what that stupid stooping old man said to the princess.'

'He said he'd always watched over her ever since she was a little wee thing, and because she'd been good and never rude or angry to her nasty old granny, he was going to make her very rich, and that the next morning some one would come and tell her about it; and before the princess had time to thank him or ask any questions he *banished.*'

'Oh, did he? Well, I'm glad he didn't stop long. I didn't think much of him for a fairy,' said Violet.

'The princess could scarcely sleep all night for thinking what would happen in the morning; and as soon as she'd had her breakfast, she got away from her granny, and went into the garden; and just as she got to the stone vase, she saw a lovely little bird perched on it, holding a little letter in its beak; and then it flew to her, and she took the letter; and the bird stayed on her shoulder, saying "Sweet, sweet," while she read it. The letter said, "Go straight to the garden gates, and get into the carriage that's waiting there. Don't speak to any one on the way." So she went at once; and there stood such a splendid carriage, all blue and silver, with six white horses;

of fairy, and my sort of doggie; and if you don't like them, I shan't tell you any more.'

'Oh yes, Frank dear, please do; I want to hear what that stupid stooping old man said to the princess.'

'He said he'd always watched over her ever since she was a little wee thing, and because she'd been good and never rude or angry to her nasty old granny, he was going to make her very rich, and that the next morning some one would come and tell her about it; and before the princess had time to thank [illegible] any questions he vanished.'

'Oh, [illegible] I'm glad he didn't stop long [illegible] of him for a fairy, said [illegible]

[illegible] scarcely sleep a wink for [illegible] y
[illegible] in the morning, and as [illegible] e
[illegible] she got away from [illegible] y
[illegible] the garden, and just as [illegible]
[illegible] she saw a lovely little [illegible]
[illegible] little letter in its beak, and
[illegible] took the letter and [illegible]
[illegible] saying "Sweet sweet [illegible]
[illegible] letter said "O, sweet [illegible]
[illegible] get into the carriage [illegible]
[illegible] speak to any one of [illegible]
[illegible] there stood [illegible]
[illegible] silver, with [illegible]

and footmen in blue and silver liveries were holding open the door for her.'

'Oh, how lovely!' said Violet; 'and did the little bird get in too?'

'Yes; he still sat on the princess' shoulder. And after she'd been driving very fast for ever so long, the carriage turned into some lovely great gates, and stopped at the door of a marble palace; and the footmen again opened the carriage door, and out flew the little bird and perched itself inside the palace hall. And as the princess stepped out of the carriage, she saw the bird gradually grow bigger and bigger, and change into the little old man who had been to her the day before; and he led her into a splendid room all pink satin, and filled with flowers and things, and told her it all belonged to her, and she'd ever so many thousand pounds a year, and lots of servants and carriages, and that she should marry some one very soon, and be happy ever after.'

'Oh, it's splendid!' said Violet; 'and whom did she marry? I must know.'

'Oh!' said Frank, who hadn't thought of anybody. 'Why, she married, let—me—see—why—Ted Wilberforce, of course.'

'No; that she didn't,' said Violet, 'for I'm quite sure *he* wouldn't have her.'

'Wouldn't he, though? He'd be very lucky if she *had him* with all those freckles,' said Frank.

'She'd love the freckles if she could get 'em; but I know she didn't. I shall just ask Mudge if she did,' and Violet slid down from the tree and ran into the house, followed by Frank.

'Mudge dear, Wilberforce didn't marry the princess, did he?' said Violet, dashing into the drawing-room quite out of breath.

'What *do* you mean, Leta dear?' said Mrs. Orington; and Frank had to explain about his fairy tale, and how he didn't know who the princess was to marry, and so he'd said Wilberforce.

Mrs. Orington was much amused, and told Violet she was very silly to get out of temper with Frank for telling her tales, and that it was quite time they both went to bed.

But Violet couldn't recover herself; and as they went out of the room to get ready for bed, she gave Frank a push, and said, 'He *didn't* marry your ugly old princess.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE ORPHAN SCHOOL.

AS Granny considered that Violet and Frank had been particularly good all the week, Mrs. Orington took them with her to fetch Amy Gray.

After reaching London by train, they drove in a brougham for a long way—such a very long way it seemed to the two little ones—until they came at last to a great building in the eastern end of London.

'Oh! what a great ugly place!' said Frank.

It was not at all what he had pictured.

The carriage drove through the gates and brought them to some stone steps, where they had to get out and walk through a large courtyard before arriving at the door. There were rows and rows of bare-looking windows, without a sign of life, and the children's steps echoed as they walked on the stone slabs. The place seemed so bare and desolate that it struck quite a chill in the children's hearts, and

they went close to their mother and took her hand for protection.

When they rang the bell, they could hear it reverberate in the house very loudly, as if it were a large empty place, and the two children looked at one another as if both were frightened; in fact, Violet was almost ready to cry.

A gaunt-looking old servant opened the door, and they were shown into a bare, comfortless room.

'I don't like it, Mudge,' said Violet, whose eyes were filling with tears. 'You won't leave us, will you?'

'You silly child, Violet! Why, you are generally brave, and don't mind how you are knocked and kicked about in romping, and here you are frightened at a big house!'

Mrs. Orington did not feel very happy herself, and gave a shudder as she looked round and thought what a sad thing it was for hundreds of little children to be herded together in this cold, cheerless place, instead of being in happy homes with loving parents.

'We shall not be here long, little one,' Mrs. Orington continued; 'and think how nice it will be to bring your cousin away from this ugly place to our comfortable home. You wouldn't like to live in this room, Leta, would you? There is no nice soft rug to lie on.'

'Oh no, Mudge.'

The furniture consisted of a bare wooden table, some uncomfortable-looking wooden chairs, some cocoa-nut matting in place of carpet, and a board hanging on the wall with rules and regulations of some sort printed on it. But this might be called luxury to what Violet afterwards saw.

Presently a severe-looking woman came in. This was the matron.

'I have come for little Amy Gray,' said Mrs. Orington.

The woman, without speaking or asking Mrs. Orington to be seated, went to the door and pulled a bell that hung outside it, and shouted to a servant who appeared in the passage, '*Number* 241, *Girls' side, is fetched*,' and then disappeared. Violet and Frank were both more frightened than ever, for this woman was very grim and gruff; and in fact, Frank afterwards, when he got home and could laugh at it all, called her old Grim and Gruff. They had to wait some minutes, until at last the matron appeared again, bringing with her a girl of about eleven years old, who was such an object that Frank began to laugh, he really couldn't help it; and Violet wasn't quite sure whether she was laughing or crying; and the poor girl herself was very pale and trembling, and when Mrs. Orington said a few kind words to her, she hardly seemed to understand.

'Is this her walking dress?' said Mrs. Orington.

'That's the uniform,' said the matron severely; 'and very excellent the clothes are, of the best material.'

'Probably, but they look rather odd. Something much cheaper and less striking would be better.'

The dress was certainly very ugly, the most striking part of it being a large straw bonnet,—quite an erection of straw, which must have been rather costly. It was of a shape like those worn in the days of our grandmothers, and had a band of ribbon put straight across and tied under the chin.

'Isn't this very uncomfortable to your ears, my dear?' said Mrs. Orington, untying it.

The child did not dare to answer.

'Those who look for charity mustn't complain,' said the matron. 'There's no picking and no choosing here. You must put up with the clothes; and please to return them, for they are not allowed to keep them unless they stay to the proper age.'

All this was said roughly, for the matron was accustomed to treating the friends of the children as if they were mere beggars or tramps.

'And has she no luggage?' asked Mrs. Orington.

'Luggage!' almost shrieked the matron. 'I tell you she has no outfit, because she is leaving before

her time.' The notion of a child with any luggage to take away seemed to the matron to be far too preposterous a thing.

'But I suppose she can have a change of linen to last till I can get her some clothes?'

'It's against the rule,' said the matron.

'Oh, very well,' said Mrs. Orington; 'I must get her one or two things on the way back. Let me take off this hideous thing, my dear,' removing her bonnet, 'and we'll buy one on the way.'

All this time poor little Amy Gray was looking quite scared, and Frank and Violet were staring at her, for she was such an object that they could not keep their eyes off.

The truth was, that although Mrs. Orington had been corresponding with the school authorities for some time concerning the child's removal, the girl herself had been told nothing of it; and when, as she was standing in class one morning at lessons, for the children were not allowed to sit, a servant came to inform the teacher that she was 'fetched,' she could hardly believe it. She knew very well what the term 'fetched' meant, and that it was only used when any child was going away altogether, or going for holidays. Holidays were allowed in this school to those who had any friends to take them; but many had not, or had only friends who were glad to forget them, and poor little Amy had

never been outside the walls since she entered, nearly five years before. This was not holiday time, though it was near it, and Amy had as usual counted on having to remain behind. But when she heard the magic word that she was fetched, she thought there must be some mistake. She was hurriedly put into her best frock, which was exactly the same shape and colour as the everyday one, for the uniform never changed; and the hideous bonnet and an ugly cape were put on, and she appeared before Mrs. Orington as we have described. She was so bewildered that her legs trembled as she walked; and when Mrs. Orington spoke to her, she felt she could not utter a word.

While Mrs. Orington and the matron were talking, she tried to realize what was happening; but the joy of the prospect before her, and the pleasure of hearing such kind words addressed to her by Mrs. Orington, were too much, and she fainted.

This poor little thing had been used to nothing but hard treatment for years. The officials at the school, like officials at most of these places, cared only for their own comfort, and took no notice of the children beyond making slaves of them. Little Amy had been known as 241. That was her name, and that was how she had come to think of herself. She was only the two hundred

and forty-first bundle of humanity amongst a great many other bundles; and when Mrs. Orington, with her sweet voice that is so full of sympathy and tenderness, called her Amy, and said comforting words to her, it was more than the child could bear. She, however, soon got better; and when they were ready to go, Mrs. Orington turned to the matron and said, 'I shall have no objection to giving a small subscription to this Institution. Shall I pay it to you, or where shall I send it?'

The matron's manner changed in a moment. She could hardly speak civilly before; now she was most obsequious. She had been commissioned by the committee to solicit subscriptions whenever she saw a chance; and when visitors came to look over the Institution, she generally managed to make them leave something with her for the school before going.

'Oh yes, ma'am,' she said, 'I can receive it. Will you kindly come into my room, and I'll give you a printed form of receipt?' She led the way across the passage to another room, which was very comfortably furnished. The children all went trooping after her, for Frank and Violet both seemed determined to hang on to their mother's skirts while they were in that dreadful place.

'Perhaps you would like to go over the building, ma'am; it's not visitors' day, but I shall be very happy to take you.'

'What do you say, children?' asked Mrs. Orington. 'Would you like to go and see the poor little orphan children?'

'If you go, Mother,' said Violet, holding very tightly to her.

'Then I think we will.'

'Sit down here, child,' said the matron to Amy, pointing to an easy-chair; and for the first time for many years Amy had the luxury of sitting in an easy-chair, or in fact any chair at all.

They followed the matron through long passages, till they came to a very large room, where a great number of girls, all dressed alike, were sitting or standing in groups. This was the play-room; but there were few materials for play, as there was neither table, chair, nor form, but only boxes of all shapes and sizes, on which the girls sat. There was no other furniture of any description. The floor was bare boards, the walls were of brick and whitewashed, and the windows placed high up so that no one could look out. The schoolroom contained forms and desks, and there were maps on the whitewashed walls. The little party walked from one bare room to another, till Mrs. Orington, who was saddened and depressed by the sight of everything around her, said she had seen enough, and begged she might go back to the room where she left Amy.

'If you would like to come out this way, we can take a short cut across the courtyard,' said the matron, and she opened a door which led out to a long stone colonnade, at the end of which the brougham stood waiting.

'I shall be ready in a minute, coachman,' said Mrs. Orington in passing. 'Here, children, you can get in while I fetch Amy.'

The matron was even more respectful now that she saw Mrs. Orington came in a carriage, and she said, 'Pray let me bring the child while you get in.'

But thoughtful Mrs. Orington fancied perhaps the poor child might get a parting scolding from that severe woman, so she said she did not mind going.

So presently the little maid without a bonnet, and with very closely cropped hair,—for it was cut in what is styled workhouse fashion,—appeared at the carriage door and was put inside, and wondered whether she was in a dream as the carriage rolled down the walk and through the gates and out into the world beyond the school railings—that world which had always seemed such a mysterious and romantic one to her, and of which now she thought she was going to learn something.

The orphan children never had any exercise beyond their own grounds, and so those who did not go for holidays had very dim ideas of what ordinary life was.

What would little Frank have made of it could he have known the sensation that Amy was experiencing as she drove out of those magic gates? He was so fond of all that was romantic and marvellous; but with him it was all in imagination. He was obliged to invent the fairies' stories in which he was so fond of making himself a hero and Violet a heroine; but Amy was actually acting in a fairy story, for it seemed nothing less than magic that she who had been that morning going on in the same dull round—the miserable breakfast, the uninteresting lessons, the bare play-room, the severe teachers, the insolent servants—all the same things that she had had to bear day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year—should now be suddenly carried away by a beautiful lady in a carriage to some enchanted place she knew not of. Why, Frank would almost have envied her the sensation!

Mrs. Orington had not provided herself with much money beyond the cheque she had brought for a subscription, because she did not expect to have any purchases to make, so she was only able to buy a few things for Amy on that day. A hat was soon found to suit her, and a little ready-made under-linen was procured; and her ugly tippet was removed, and a shawl, that Mrs. Orington had taken with her in case the weather changed and a

wrap were required, was thrown round the girl's shoulders. In this mixed sort of dress she got out of the brougham at Waterloo Station, and having no remembrance of a railway station, was very much astonished at all she saw. Then they all went by train to Lambton Station; and when they arrived at Lambton Hall, Violet and Frank rushed into Granny in the greatest state of excitement, to tell her all about the new-comer, and buying the hat and other things. Granny was rather astonished when she saw the odd little figure, but she welcomed her very kindly; and soon the children were sitting round the tea-table, all very happy indeed. Only Amy was not quite sure whether she shouldn't wake up and find herself in the bare play-room again. It must be a dream, she thought.

CHAPTER X.

AMY GRAY.

THE introduction of Amy Gray into the Orington family caused so much excitement for Frank and Violet, that it was with difficulty they could be persuaded to go to sleep on the night of her arrival, or to start for school the next day in good time. They begged very hard for a holiday, but as they had had one the day before, their mother would not hear of it; and moreover she thought in their present excited state a few hours at school would be the best thing for them; and their absence would also be an advantage to Amy, whom they continually pestered with questions. The fact is, that poor little Amy had been so long used to bare rooms and a bare playground, that she hardly knew the names of ordinary objects around her. She made such odd mistakes, and asked such curious questions, that the children were in a continual state of wonderment.

When Violet came down in the morning in her

pretty print dress, looking so fresh and nice, Amy could not help exclaiming, 'Oh, how pretty!'

'Yes,' said Violet in a languid manner, as if she were used to admiration; 'this is one of Frank's favourite frocks. I like pretty frocks, especially washing ones, because I'm not afraid of spoiling them. Do you always wear that ugly thing?'

'Yes,' said Amy ruefully, looking down at her ill-shapen dark stuff gown; 'we wear them winter and summer too.'

'Oh, how funny!' said Violet. 'You must be so tired of it. We shall not let you wear it, you know, because we don't like ugly things. We shall get you some new ones.'

'Oh, indeed, Leta!' said her mother, coming in. 'You're talking very grandly, I think.'

'Well, Mother dear, I mean *you* will get her some dresses, you know; won't you?'

'Yes; I'll soon put her into a comfortable washing frock. Mrs. Riley is coming to-day to do it at once, for I am sure you must be very warm in that frock, Amy. Now come to breakfast, children.'

Amy had been accustomed to sit at a bare wooden table, and have dry bread and milk and water for breakfast, and had not been allowed to have a knife or spoon or plate, but was obliged to break up the great hunch of bread as well as she could, and drink the milk and water from a basin.

She was quite awkward with her cup and saucer, and did not hold her knife and fork nicely, because no one had taken the trouble to teach her.

Granny sat at one end of the table and poured out the tea and coffee, and said to Amy, 'Which do you take, my dear?'

'I don't know,' said Amy, turning red and looking nervous.

'Don't you know which you like best?'

'I haven't tasted coffee,' said Amy.

Frank and Violet could not help having some fun over this. It was probable that Amy had tasted tea and coffee before she went to the orphan school, but the five dull years had driven all her early life quite out of her memory.

When the tea and coffee question was settled by Amy trying coffee, there arose another difficulty. Mrs. Orington had in front of her a ham and some fried soles. When Amy was asked which she would take, she again looked very confused, and said she did not know, as she had never tasted either. Some ham was given to her, and the mustard offered, and she looked up at Mrs. Orington to know what she was to do with the mustard. All these little incidents brought numberless remarks and questions from Frank and Violet. It seemed so strange that such a big girl, who seemed to them almost grown-up, should not know the very commonest things.

'Did you never have mustard at school?' asked Violet.

'No,' said Amy shyly. She was beginning to feel how ignorant she was, and was half inclined to cry when the children laughed so much. The long confinement in the orphan school had made her morbid and self-conscious, and she fancied that every one was always watching her.

'Oh dear! I couldn't eat my ham without mustard,' said Violet affectedly.

'But they got no ham,' said Mrs. Orington, 'and that was worse than no mustard. You see what a lucky little girl you are to get such good things, while all those poor little orphans have to go without.'

At this moment the attention of every one at table was attracted by the dreadful grimaces Amy was making. She had managed to take too much mustard, and as this was her first experience of it, she did not know what to do.

It may be imagined that these mistakes caused some amusement to Frank and Violet, and some confusion to poor Amy. It was so difficult to make the two little ones see any but the funny side of the matter. They could not realize the sad life Amy must have led, to be ignorant of such small things. She had evidently been accustomed to a life so different from their own, that they could not help asking a great many questions about it.

Mrs. Orington was glad to get the little ones off to school that morning; and when a short time after she went to consult with Granny about some material that could be made up as quickly as possible into a cotton frock for Amy, Mrs. Leslie said:

'My dear, I'm afraid you have given yourself a task if you're going to bring up that girl. Why, she has everything to learn; it's as bad as taking a baby, in fact worse, for I expect you'll find there's a good deal to unlearn. I should send her to school at once.'

'It would be cruel to send her to a private school yet,' said Mrs. Orington. 'The girls would all laugh at her; and that would bring out the worst points in her character, and perhaps spoil her for life. I can see that I have a task before me, but not so much in teaching her the usages of everyday life: that will be easy enough. What I have to guard against is, that her ignorance in little matters may develop pride and arrogance in the children; they will naturally take the lead, and make her do as they wish. She, on the other hand, is apt to be morbid and melancholy, and look at things in a false light; whereas I should like to make her healthy in mind as well as body.'

'She looks delicate enough, poor child,' said Mrs. Leslie; 'and I don't wonder at it; and I don't think

she would be a bad-looking girl if we could only make her like other children.'

'I think she will be a very pretty girl, if I can only succeed in making her what I wish. She has good features, and good eyes; but there is a sort of miserable look about her—a hungry look, I might call it: she has been starved in mind as well as body. Such a life as she has led hurts both body and soul; and I can see that I shall have many difficulties to meet with before I can get either mind or body into a healthy condition. But I mean to try, and mean to be patient.'

'Well, my dear, you know best. But *I* consider your first duty is to your children; and if you think it will do them harm to have this girl in the house, you are not acting as a mother should. I am sure, when I brought up you and your brothers, I'—

'Yes, Mother; I know what you're going to say, because you've said it so many times already,—that when you brought us up, you were a great deal more particular and strict than I am. But tell me now, is there any one who spoils the children like Granny does?'

This was always a conclusive argument to any dispute between Mrs. Leslie and her daughter, for without doubt Granny was really more indulgent to the children than any one.

Mrs. Riley the dressmaker, and Maria the

children's maid, worked so quickly at Amy's frock that by tea-time she was able to put it on.

Mrs. Orington had taken her into Onslow in the afternoon, and bought shoes for her, and various other little things; so when she sat down to tea, she had really begun to look almost like other children, except that her cropped head gave the idea that she was recovering from an illness.

After tea Amy went with Frank and Violet into the garden. At the orphan school they had not been allowed to go into the grounds in front of the building, but had always to keep to the playground, a bare gravelled place.

'May we play in this beautiful place?' said Amy.

'Yes, of course we may,' said Violet grandly. 'But you mustn't go near the flower beds, of course; and you may do just what you like in *our* part of the garden. Come along to our part.'

Amy followed them to their own piece of ground, and they introduced her to the elm trees and the various bushes and corners which formed their stations when they played trains, and told her long stories about Miss Angelina and Miss Jemima Spinks; and then they clambered up into their favourite seat in the elm, and told Amy to come up also, and she turned pale with fear at the thought of such a thing.

'See how I do it,' said Frank, coming down and going up again; 'it's so easy.'

'No; I'm frightened,' said Amy.

'Oh, you big silly!' said Violet. 'Why, it's as easy as easy can be. And look at us walk along this wall. Amy, do come up and try if you can do it; it's such fun.'

'Now do,' said Frank. But poor Amy felt that she could no more do it than she could fly; and oh! how she wished she were half as clever as these little children seemed to be.

'If you could only come up, you'd see lots of things,' Frank went on; 'you'd see Cedar Cottage and the big cedar tree. It's a female cedar, you know, and is more graceful than the male. I suppose you can't tell a male tree from a female, can you? I can tell most of them.' This was said with an air of superior knowledge.

'What do you mean about male and female trees?' said Amy.

'Oh! don't you know that some trees have male and female, just like us, you know? This elm is a male. We shall have to teach you all about it. If you would only get up here, I could show you the difference between a male and female cedar, because there is a male one in the grounds at Castlemans which you can see from here. And oh! do come. Here's the ugly Angelina just come to the window,

and is looking just as cross as your old Grim and Gruff at the school.'

This mention of the matron brought back the remembrance of the school to Amy, and she thought to herself what an age it seemed since yesterday afternoon, when she was driving out of the gates, leaving the ugly place behind. It was all so like a fairy story, and would be so still if she weren't every now and then reminded of reality by a little petty tyranny on the part of the children, which rather hurt her.

'There's a jolly old blackbird,' went on Frank, 'tugging away at a worm on Angelina's lawn; and isn't he enjoying it? Now he's going at another! What a supper he's making! If I were a fairy, I should turn Angelina and Jemima into two large worms, and make a large blackbird come and gobble them up. Only I don't believe the bird would ever sing after, because they'd be sure to disagree with him.'

To Amy this little boy of eight years old seemed wonderfully clever. She listened to all his chatter and nonsense as if it were the greatest wisdom, and wondered whether she should ever know as much.

'I wish I could see a blackbird,' said Amy.

'A blackbird!' exclaimed Violet, laughing. 'Why, there's lots of them, hundreds and thousands.'

'Now, Violet,' said Frank, 'you know you are fond of *exagellating*, and that there are not so very many blackbirds in our garden.'

'Are those blackbirds that are flying about and making all that noise?' said Amy, pointing up above her.

'Those?' said Violet. 'Why, don't you know they're rooks? Blackbirds ain't as big as that, and don't go about all in a lump like that.'

Amy felt she had more and more to learn every moment.

'Well, Violet,' said Frank, 'if Amy won't come up here, of course we must go down and amuse her.'

'Of course we must,' answered Violet grandly, and these young people descended from the tree.

'I don't want you to put yourselves out to amuse me,' said Amy rather sulkily.

'But it doesn't put us out,' said Frank politely.

'Of course not,' said Violet. 'Now, Frank, let us come and sit at America station and tell tales.'

'Do you call a station America?' said Amy in astonishment.

'Of course,' answered Violet. 'Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.'

'But you can't get to America without going on the water,' said Amy, who knew a great deal more of geography than the little ones.

'Oh! can't you?' said Violet coolly. 'Then we must have a bridge.'

'But there's the Atlantic Ocean in between, and it's thousands of miles across, and you couldn't put a bridge over.'

'Who told you so?' asked Violet, not quite liking that Amy should know anything that she didn't.

'I learnt it at school.'

'But perhaps they didn't tell you quite right there,' suggested Frank, 'because Mother says it's not a good school. We've always gone to America by train.'

'Yes; and that's the way *I* shall always go,' said Violet, with an air of not allowing any one to deceive her as to the position of America.

'But I can show it to you on a map,' said Amy, anxious to display what knowledge she had.

'I hate maps!' said Violet sharply; 'there's such a lot of them at school.'

Amy looked very unhappy at not being allowed to have her way about America; and Frank, who thought the two girls might quarrel, and that it was his duty to keep peace, said:

'Well, whether there *is* any water, or whether there isn't'—

'There isn't, I tell you,' Violet insisted.

'But there is on the map,' said Amy.

'Then I won't play any more,' said Violet, walking away from America station.

'Now, Violet,' said Frank, 'that's stupid, because you haven't begun to play yet; and I was going to ask Amy to tell me all about Grim and Gruff and the school.'

This was too great a temptation, and Violet condescended to return to 'America,' and sit down to listen to Amy.

Poor Amy did not at all want to talk about the school, and would have preferred never mentioning it again in her life, for she had begun to have a feeling of shame about it. When she saw how different she was from these children, she understood it was because she had been brought up differently.

She wanted now to try and learn all they knew, and be like them, and forget all the old associations which had so much that was horrible mixed up with them. The tears came into her eyes as Frank said, 'Now, Amy, do tell us about old Grim and Gruff.'

'Yes, do,' said Violet; 'the nasty old thing!'

'Did she ever eat up any of the little girls for dinner—I mean, very little ones, like Violet?'

'She shouldn't eat me,' said Violet indignantly.

'Of course not,' said Frank; 'but I meant your size.'

'I'm not so very little, Frank.'

'Well, I mean *rather* little girls; do tell us, Amy. Why, what are you crying for?'

'Oh, don't cry, Amy!' said Violet. 'I didn't mean

to be cross; you shall have some water to America if you like, and a bridge for the train. Now don't cry, but come and tell us all about the school.'

'Yes; now do,' said Frank, going up and patting her in quite a fatherly way on the back. 'We didn't mean to *conkerdict* you, you know, only we never have had any water to America. Cheer up.'

'It isn't that,' said Amy, sobbing; 'but I—I—don't—like to talk about—the—the—school.'

'Oh dear!' said Frank; 'why not? It's so amusing.'

'But I was so miserable, and I don't know anything like you do, and I'm so stupid.'

'Oh no!' said Frank; 'you're quite clever: you know all about the maps and everything, and I never could learn it. And don't cry because you've left old Grim and Gruff locked up in that place. And she can't come after you, because Mudge and Granny wouldn't have her; and if ever she comes and tries to get you away from us in the street, I shall go to the Police Station at Onslow. I always pass it on the way to school, and I know all the policemen and talk to them, and I should tell them to take her up.'

Frank had evidently considered the possibility of the matron coming to get Amy back again.

But Amy would not be comforted. She had been so long used to a miserable life that she could not bear all the happiness that had come to her in the

last two days; neither could she bear the feeling of shame that had come upon her, in finding herself so different from the little Oringtons.

These children with all their faults could always admire what was good and clever in others, and when they met any one who was better or cleverer or richer than themselves, they were not envious. This perhaps was because their mother had always taught them to reverence what was good and great, and never to be envious of any one. But poor little Amy had had no kind mother to guide her. Her bringing up had been such as to repress all that was good, and develop what was bad. At the orphan school the children, so long as they obeyed the teachers and other officials, were allowed to display towards one another the worst passions. There was no one to teach them to be unselfish and give up to one another. Each tried to grab what she could in every way; it was, in fact, a case of 'every one for herself.' And where there is selfishness, there is sure to be envy. Envy is a very nasty thing to suffer from; it is like a gnawing pain at the heart. Poor Amy had become hysterical with too much happiness, and was suffering from the pain of envy also; so she could not easily stop crying.

Frank and Violet were good-hearted children, and anxious to comfort her; but she would not be comforted, so Violet went to appeal to her mother.

Mrs. Orington was dining, and the children were forbidden to enter the dining-room at dinner-time; but as a servant came out with some dishes, Violet put her head just inside the door and said:

'Mudge dear, it's so *mizzable* out there. Amy *will* cry and won't stop, and we've asked her to ever so much.'

'There, my dear,' said Mrs. Leslie, 'that's the sort of thing you'll be troubled with!'

'Come, Violet, and tell me what it is. I hope you haven't been quarrelling?' said Mrs. Orington.

Violet explained the American difficulty.

Mrs. Orington sent for Amy and Frank, and the latter told her why Amy was crying.

'Oh, that's nothing!' said Mrs. Orington. 'I am sure, Amy, you need not think they're clever, for they are great dunces in school, and Violet doesn't know how to read. You must teach them what you know, and they'll teach you what they know, and then you'll both be wiser. And we won't talk about the orphan school any more. Do you hear, children? You are not to ask more questions till Amy can talk about it. She'll laugh at it all some day, I hope. Now you chicks shall have a treat and stay up half an hour later to-night, as it's such a beautiful bright evening, and take a message round to Cousin Popsy for me, and introduce Amy to Auntie.'

Amy was therefore taken to Rose Bank. Mr. Brooks, who had heard all about her, seemed much interested in her, and began asking her various questions about her life at the school. When she answered him, she said 'Sir,' and made a curtsey. This set Frank and Violet off laughing, because they could not understand why she should do it. Then Amy showed signs of crying again, and Mrs. Brooks came to the rescue. They found out that the only gentlemen Amy had ever spoken to within her remembrance were the members of the committee of the school, to whom the children were always made to drop a curtsey and speak very respectfully. In old times young people had to speak and act in this respectful manner to their parents as well as every one else; but Frank and Violet did not know about old times, or perhaps they would not have laughed. Although it is no longer the fashion to use so much ceremony in addressing our parents, let us hope there is still as much real love and respect as there ever was.

'Pray why do you laugh, children?' said Uncle Brooks sternly. 'She has only done what young folks were obliged to do in my young days, and what they ought to do now. Children were very different in my time; they did not dare to laugh when their elders were present.'

Frank always thought his uncle's young days

must have been very unpleasant ones, but he never dared to say so.

Popsy returned with the children to Lambton Hall, and went in to have a chat with her aunt and cousin. Frank described their interview with his uncle, and said :

'Oh, Mother! and as we were coming away Uncle called Amy such a funny name; it was a very long word, and I can't remember it, but it sounded so dreadful.'

'You silly boy!' said Popsy; 'it wasn't dreadful. He only said she was "a psychological study."'

'Well, I wouldn't like to be called a—a—that,' said Frank; 'would you, Mudge?'

Poor Amy put on such a woe-begone expression, as if she objected quite as much as Frank did to being called such a long name; so Mrs. Orington very quickly assured her that it meant nothing unpleasant, and then the children all went to bed.

This was the end of Amy's first day out in the world—the great world which she had always so longed to see. Although she was very happy at having such kind friends, and so much comfort and freedom, yet she felt mortified and shamed; and this gave her a sense of disappointment, for she had not calculated on there being anything to stand in the way of her happiness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THIEF.

THE summer holidays were fast approaching, and Frank and Violet were counting the days till Ernest came home

Amy had now been a week at Lambton Hall, and was learning the ways and manners of every-day life; but she still made many mistakes. Mrs. Orington, instead of setting lessons for her to learn, gave her a book to read, which was all about the doings of a family of brothers and sisters, so that she might become more acquainted with family life; and she also instructed her a little in drawing and music, as she showed some taste for both; and Mrs. Orington thought it would be pleasanter for her to know something of what other girls knew before going to a day school in the neighbourhood, where she intended sending her with Violet so soon as she had lost some of her awkwardness.

After the first few days Amy had got over her shyness at meals, and soon showed that she had a very good appetite.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Leslie to her daughter one day, 'that child eats a great deal, and so fast, too; and do you see how she watches the dishes in case she shouldn't get enough? I call it disgusting, and a bad example for the children.'

'Poor girl!' said Mrs. Orington, 'she's been starved, and does not know how to eat enough now that her appetite has come. She is really in need of the food, and it is difficult to make her understand that she can have as much as she wants. I suppose she scrambled for her meals as well as she could at the orphan school. When she is stronger, she'll be more civilised. I'll speak to her about it, and tell her she can have plenty.'

Before, however, Mrs. Orington had an opportunity of speaking to her, Frank and Violet ran into her just before their tea-time, in great excitement, Frank saying:

'Oh, Mudge dear, Maria says Amy's been stealing a slice of cake that was put on the table for tea!'

'Nonsense, dear,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Yes, Mother. Maria says she's suspected her the last two nights, because one evening there were some little tarts, and one was gone; and yesterday evening there was biscuits, and ever so many were gone when we sat down to tea. So Maria counted how many slices of cake were cut to-day, and there's one gone.'

He was almost out of breath with speaking so quickly.

'Don't be so excited,' said Mrs. Orington. 'You mustn't call it stealing; the poor girl was hungry, and couldn't wait for you.'

'But Maria says it's so greedy,' said Frank.

'So it is; but perhaps you'd be greedy if you had been starved as she has. She has had no nice things for years and years, perhaps never at all, and you have something nice every day. I'll come down to tea and see about it.'

The children had tea in the play-room, and Granny generally sat at the table with them; but if she and Mrs. Orington were both out or engaged, Maria poured out the tea.

Mrs. Orington rang for Maria, as she wished her to hear what she had to say to the children.

'Now, Maria, pour out the tea this evening,' she said, 'and see that Miss Amy has plenty to eat; for she has not been well fed at school, and for some weeks she will require extra food. And, Amy, don't be afraid of asking for food when you are hungry. I hear you have commenced your tea the last three days without waiting for the children to come home from school. Don't do that again, because it's not kind and polite; they like to have their meals with you. But if you are hungry, tell Maria, or me, or Mrs. Leslie, and you shall have

something directly. Never be afraid to say when you are hungry. And I am sure Frank and Violet will not mind about your having begun before them, because they know you didn't understand that you might ask,' and Mrs. Orington left the room.

Amy sat dumb with astonishment. It was quite true that when she saw the tea-table laid in readiness for the children's arrival from school, and was alone in the room, she could not resist helping herself to some of the good things. It was understood that the children should eat bread and butter first, before the sweet things, and she knew she was doing wrong—that, in fact, she was stealing. She had often stolen at the school, though she had never there the chance of stealing anything but dry bread. If she were found out, she was punished, and received her punishment with stolid indifference; but now, instead of punishment, she had been gently rebuked, and been told to ask for whatever she wanted. This rebuke had a great deal more effect on her than any punishment, and she felt that she could fall down at Mrs. Orington's feet and implore her pardon.

This lesson sunk deep into her heart, and she never attempted again to touch any food when no one was looking.

There was also another fault which Mrs. Orington had soon to endeavour to cure. The girl had

always worn such ugly clothes that she was apt to be vain of all the pretty things she now had, and Mrs. Orington and Mrs. Leslie both noticed that Amy was always peeping at herself in the glass, and doing it furtively, as if afraid of being caught.

Now if Violet wanted to admire herself, she would go and stand right in front of the glass and say to any one near her, 'Don't I look pretty in this frock?' At the same time she would soon forget all about the frock, and was indeed a little too careless of her appearance, for she got in a terrible mess sometimes. But Amy appeared to be always conscious of herself and her dress, and was often found in a room alone, standing in front of a mirror.

Mrs. Orington had a large toilet-glass in her bedroom, in which she could see herself full length; and one day as she walked in, she found Amy admiring herself in this glass, and twisting and turning before it. Now as there was no occasion for Amy to be in Mrs. Orington's room, she knew she must have come there from mere vanity to admire herself, and she determined to try and cure her; so she said:

'Well, Amy, isn't the looking-glass in your room big enough? Are you obliged to come to mine?'

Amy looked very red, and cast her eyes down, and moved as if to go out of the room.

'No; don't go,' said Mrs. Orington kindly. 'Come here, and stand in front of the glass, and

have a good look at yourself. Now, what do you see? Come, look up; don't be ashamed, and tell me what you see in the glass.' Amy was very much ashamed, and would not speak.

'Well, now, shall I tell you what I can see? I can see a girl of nearly twelve years old, who is not quite as tall as she ought to be, because she has been half-starved. Her cheeks are too pale—at least they were till she blushed, her hair is too short, her figure is a little clumsy, and her general appearance is not quite what it might be. I think if that same little girl will come and stand before this glass in a year's time, perhaps we may see a nice straight figure, some curly hair, rosy cheeks, and a face in which some good qualities are to be seen. Then there will be something worth looking at, but at present it's only waste of time to stand before the glass. In a few days you will be twelve years old. On your thirteenth birthday we will come and stand before this glass again, and perhaps then we shall see a girl who is both pretty and good. It is not wrong to wish to be pretty, but there is no face so beautiful as the face of a thoroughly good person. So try to be good, my child, and you are sure to be pretty.'

On the day before Ernest's arrival, Violet and Frank were talking about him, and Violet said:

'Oh! we do have such lovely games when Ernest

is at home; and Ted Wilberforce is so nice, and he comes to play with us. I am longing for the boys to come, for I do love to play with the boys.'

Amy looked up as if she had said something shocking.

'Don't you like to play with boys, Amy? I do, because they are so jolly. Did you play with the boys at the orphan school?'

'No,' said Amy, looking down in a mock-modest way; 'we weren't allowed to look at them.'

'Not look at them?' said Violet. 'Why not?'

'Because it wasn't proper.'

'What does that mean?' said Violet.

'We were forbidden to turn round and look at the boys in chapel, which was the only place we could see them.'

'Oh, how funny!' said Violet. 'Then you never had any beautiful games like I do with Ernest and Ted Wilberforce. Oh! isn't it delightful, Frank? They'll come to-morrow, and then we'll have such games! We never play at trains except when Ernie's here, because he's the train and everything.'

'Oh, yes,' said Frank; 'and Amy can be Ernie's old woman with the luggage that never is in time for her train, can't she?'

Amy didn't consider this flattering. Ernest was fond of talking to some imaginary old woman when he played trains, and would say, 'Now, my good

woman, we can't wait any longer for you. Get up,' and he would pretend to push her in, and then clap his hands for an imitation of banging the door, and go on.

'And may I play with the boys?' asked Amy.

'Of course you may,' said Frank and Violet both at once.

'And now, Violet and Amy,' said Frank, 'you must come and help me weed Ernie's bit of garden, because I promised to keep it in order for him, and I'm afraid I've neglected it lately. We must get it done before he comes to-morrow, you know.' They each had a little garden of their own. 'Now, you two girls begin at that end, and I'll begin at this.'

'I don't know which are weeds,' said Amy.

'Oh, you silly!' said Violet; 'I'll show you,' and she proceeded to give a lesson on dandelions, and groundsel, and plantain, and the various enemies to a flower garden. 'But you mustn't take up this little red flower, the pimpernel, though it is a weed, because it's such a sweet little thing, and tells us what the weather is going to be.'

Just as Amy was stooping down to commence her work, thinking she now knew all about it, she gave a loud scream.

'What is the matter?' said both children at once.

She pointed to a big toad that was just crawling

out from under a bushy plant, where it had probably been having an afternoon nap.

'Oh, the dear old boy!' said Frank, taking it up in his hand; 'it *is* a handsome one! You needn't be frightened at him; he's such a useful fellow in a garden. Sexton says he likes to see plenty of toads about. And only think, Violet, we've never shown her our big'—

'Hush!' said Violet; 'don't say, because it's half the fun to open the box, you know.'

'Oh, of course!' said Frank, recollecting himself; 'let's go and get it.' He ran towards the house, but came back and whispered to Violet:

'Wouldn't she be frightened, perhaps? She isn't brave like us, you know.'

'No more she is,' said Violet proudly. 'We mustn't frighten her. We must ask Mudge whether she shall see it.'

So they went back to their weeding, and managed to get Ernie's garden to look quite tidy before they went to bed; only, as the weather was dry, and the weeds wouldn't come out easily, it is to be feared the roots of many were left in the ground, and that before long Ernest would have the work of doing it again.

And then the next day their beloved Ernie came home again, and instead of late dinner there was a late tea in the dining-room, as usual on such

occasions; and Ernie looked as happy and bright-eyed as ever, and had so much to say to Frank and Violet, and they had so much to say to him, that poor Amy felt out in the cold. How she wished that she had brothers to love her, and be as proud of her as Ernie and Frank were of Violet!

'And now you've got a new cousin, Ernie,' said his mother.

'Yes, Mother,' said Ernest, turning his frank bright face towards Amy. 'I'm so glad you've got her away from that nasty school you told me about. Aren't you glad to come?' he said to Amy.

'Yes,' she said, looking half frightened to speak to a boy of her own age.

'Now there'll be five of us for games, Mudge, won't there, with Ted? What fun it will be! I'm longing to see Ted; I've written to him three times this term.'

'I wish I could write,' said Violet.

'Then why don't you be quick and learn?' said her mother.

Ted Wilberforce had become quite a favourite with Violet, and she thought if Ernest wrote to him she should also like to do so.

'And did Ted write to you?' said Violet.

'Oh yes; such jolly letters! And he said in his last he thought he should have a pleasant surprise for us when he came home.'

'Oh! I wonder what it is!' said Violet, clapping her hands. 'Perhaps a big white dog for me!'

'No; I don't think it's that, because it's something we shall all like,' said Ernest.

After tea Ernie went into the garden to see all his favourite places again, and looked at his little garden, and said it was beautifully neat, and then hugged Violet and gave her a kiss for helping to keep it nice, and Violet said:

'Well, it *looks* very nice, Ernie; but I think most of the weeds I pulled yesterday broke off at the stem, and they'll all come up again.'

Amy thought how funny it was that Violet should be honest enough to tell this when her brother was praising her so.

Then Ernie went up into the elm, and walked on the wall, and wanted to know whether the two old cats at Cedar Cottage had been very cross lately.

The irreverent boy meant the Miss Spinkses, but neither he nor Frank nor Violet could ever be induced to talk of these ladies in a respectful manner.

Then Violet got into the swing that was between the two elm trees, and Amy pushed it for her, and Ernest and Frank sat down in a mossy corner under the wall and began to make plans for the holidays. They were two happy little fellows with six whole weeks of enjoyment before them.

Ernest and Frank.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXPEDITION.

TED WILBERFORCE'S holidays commenced about the same time as Ernest's, and not many days passed before he found his way to Lambton Hall.

He had been there many times before he went back to school after the Christmas holidays, and he and the young Oringtons had had many a capital game together; and as Mrs. Orington liked the boy very much, she was glad that he should go and play with her little ones.

Even Granny had said that he was 'really a nice quiet lad.'

With little Violet he was quite a hero, for he always took such care of her and was so gentle with her in all their games, that she thought there was no one like him.

Not that Ernest and Frank were ever rough with her, for they were both very fond of their little sister; but she took all *their* attentions as her right.

Ted Wilberforce was therefore welcomed very warmly by every one at the Hall.

'Oh, I am glad you've come,' said Violet; 'it's years since you went away!'

'Well, no; it's not quite so long as that,' said Ted, laughing; 'but it does seem a long time.'

'At any rate, we've got holidays for ever so many weeks now, so we can have capital fun,' said Frank. 'What shall we play at now, eh, Ernie?'

'Before we do anything,' said Ted, 'I've something to tell you.'

'What is it?' they all cried, clustering round him.

'Why, you know, I've a jolly little donkey at home that Papa has bought for me, so that I can ride about the place.'

'Oh, that is lovely!' said Violet.

'And if your Mamma will let you go, I'm to have all sorts of things to eat, and go for a day to Ashley Woods. We can take it in turn to ride the donkey, and he'll carry the baskets of things for our meals.'

'Oh, how splendid! And shall we be away all day?' cried Ernest and Frank in a breath.

'Yes; and I am going to take a little kettle to make our tea; won't it be fun?'

'But what will you do for a fire?' said Violet.

'Oh, I shall take a box of matches, you know; and then we shall have to gather sticks like the gipsies do, and pile them up to boil the kettle.'

'How delicious!' said Violet; 'and I'll pour out the tea, shall I?'

'Oh yes; you'll do it splendidly,' said Ted. 'Now do go and ask if you may come; I'm in such a hurry to know.'

They all ran into the house, and burst into the drawing-room, startling Mrs. Orington and Granny.

'Goodness me, children! what is the matter? Is any one hurt or ill?' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Really, chicks, you know I like to be quiet of a morning when I'm reading; so why have you come in this wild way, startling your Granny and me?'

'Oh, Mudge dear!' cried Ernest, 'it's the donkey, you know, and Ted is'—

'And I'm going to pour out tea in Ashley Woods,' said Violet, clapping her hands and dancing round her mother's chair.

'And we're going to be gipsies and boil the kettle,' said Frank.

'My dear chicks, do be quiet, and one of you tell me what it all means.'

'Why, you know, Ted has a donkey that his father has bought him; and if you'll let us go with him, he's to have everything nice to eat and a kettle to make tea; and the donkey's to carry the things, and we're to take turns to ride, and go for the day to Ashley Woods to-morrow. You'll let us go, Mudge dear, won't you?'

'Well, Ernest dear, I don't know. I scarcely care for you to be away all day; but still I think I can trust you two boys. Ted Wilberforce will not lead you into any mischief. But, Leta darling, I can't let you go. You'll stay with Mudge, won't you?'

'Oh, I do so want to pour out tea in the woods, and make the kettle boil, and be a gipsy,' said Violet.

'Yes; I know, dear. But you must stay with me to-morrow, and you shall pour out tea from your own tea things for Granny and Amy and me,—now, won't that be very nice?—and then we'll go and meet the boys coming home afterwards.'

'Yes,' said Violet rather doubtfully; but still in her own mind she thought it would be rather grand to pour out the tea for Granny and Mudge, and she knew it was no use saying anything more about going with the boys, for she saw that Mudge was quite serious when she said she wanted her.

'They may go, mayn't they, Mrs. Orington?' said Ted Wilberforce, who had just come in, being too impatient to wait in the garden any longer.

'Yes, Ted, if you'll promise me not to get into any mischief, and be back here not later than seven o'clock; and Violet, Amy, and myself will come and meet you.'

'Oh, that will be jolly! And, indeed, dear Mrs. Orington, you may trust me;' and surely any one

looking into the boy's bright honest face would have felt that he could be trusted.

'I'm not to go, Ted,' said Violet in a very doleful voice.

'I'm so sorry, Violet. *Won't* you let her go, please, Mrs. Orington?' said Wilberforce.

'No; not to-morrow. I want Violet with me, Ted;' and he didn't press the matter further, for he knew Mrs. Orington meant what she said.

'And may Ernest and Frank go with me now to help to get the things ready for the morning?'

'Very well, Ted. Now be off with you all; and, Violet dear, come for a walk with me to see Mrs. Sexton.'

The boys rushed off to Castlemans to make the preparations for their expedition to Ashley Woods They were loud in their praises of the donkey, which was certainly a handsome specimen of that somewhat despised race of animals.

'What jolly panniers!' said Ernest.

'Yes; won't they hold all the things well? And here's our kettle; and we're to have these plates and mugs and knives and forks.'

'How splendid!' said Frank. 'I do hope it will be a fine day.'

'I think we may be pretty sure of that, for our gardener says the weather isn't likely to change for some time to come.'

'And we're not to know anything about what we have to eat till we unpack the things when we reach the woods; but I know cook will pack some nice things for us. Shall we have some rides in the meadow? Jack often takes me round.'

'Oh, do let's! And did you name him Jack?' said Frank.

'No; he was called Jack before he came here. I think it's a very good name; don't you?'

'Yes, very,' they both said.

Then they each had several rides on Jack, round and round the meadow, till it was time for the two boys to go home.

'Good-bye,' said Ted. 'Now you'll be sure to be in time, won't you?—not a minute later than ten o'clock?'

'No fear!' they cried out as they ran off.

By six o'clock the next morning, Ernest and Frank were out of bed to see what sort of day it was.

'Oh, I say, isn't it dull?' said Ernest. 'I do hope it won't rain.'

'I know I've heard Mudge say these grey mornings turn out fine hot days generally,' said Frank.

'Don't you wish it was ten o'clock, Frank?'

'Yes, that I do; and we've four whole hours to wait, and there's no one up yet, I know. Those lazy servants haven't moved yet.'

'Just hark at those blackbirds; aren't they making a noise?' said Ernest. 'And just see how they keep flying down to the lawn, and making a dash at a worm.'

'Look what a big one that fellow's got!' said Frank. 'Well, I suppose they like them; I shouldn't like worms for my breakfast.'

'No; I suppose you like eggs, and bread and butter better.'

And so they went on chattering and staring out of the window till the dressing-bell rang at half-past seven. By the time breakfast was ready at about half-past eight, the sun was shining brilliantly, and not a cloud was to be seen.

'Well, boys, you've a lovely day,' said Mrs. Orington, 'and I hope you'll all enjoy it very much; and when once you reach the woods, it'll be cool and pleasant, but you'll find it hot getting there, I think.'

'I like it hot,' said Ernest.

'So do I, boiling,' said Frank.

'Well, I do hope, my dear children,' said Granny, 'that you will not get into mischief. I shall feel very anxious all day; in fact, if I had my way, you certainly should not have gone so far by yourselves.'

'Granny's getting terrified,' said Violet; 'as if Ted Wilberforce couldn't take care of any one.'

'You seem quite to believe in Ted, Leta,' said her mother, laughing.

'Yes I *do*, Mudge. I consider him a wonderful boy, and I could trust myself with him anywhere. So really, you see, Granny needn't be terrified; need she, now?'

'Well, after your opinion, perhaps she won't,' said Frank.

'Now, Mudge dear, mayn't we start?' said Ernest.

'Yes; only don't hurry. You've plenty of time; and mind you leave the woods quite by six o'clock, and we'll come and meet you.'

So, after kissing and saying good-bye, the boys started for Castlemans, which they reached some time before ten o'clock; but they found Ted quite ready.

'Here you are; that's all right. I was afraid you'd be late, and everything's been ready the last half hour, and Jack's quite as impatient to start as I am.'

'Jack's got enough to carry, I think,' said Ernest.

'Well, yes. I thought we wouldn't ride him much going, because we shall be glad of him as we come back, you know,' said Ted.

Ashley Woods were about three miles from Lambton, and the road that led to them was very pretty, one side consisting almost entirely of orchards, where the apples were hanging thickly on all the trees and looking very tempting. On the other side of the road were corn-fields looking golden in the sunlight, and between them and the road were

To Ashley Woods.

some fine old trees dotted here and there, in which the birds were singing merrily.

Not that the three boys took any heed of these things, though doubtless unconsciously they added much to their enjoyment of the walk to the woods.

By the time they had walked half the distance, they began to feel the heat very much, and Ted and Ernest took off their jackets; but Frank said he liked the heat, so they trudged on talking, laughing, and singing, as happy as could be.

'Now we can see the woods,' cried Ernest.

'Won't it be jolly to get under the big trees and have a rest?' said Ted. 'And then, you know, we must find a nice comfortable place for our meals, and unpack all the things.'

'Yes, and gather the sticks to make the kettle boil; though we don't want that till we have tea, do we?' said Frank.

'No; but we'll get the sticks all ready,' said Ted.

After walking on for some time longer, they reached the woods, and, oh! how cool and shady it was, and how green and velvety the turf was under the trees!

'Just look at those foxgloves, Ernest; aren't they splendid? And they're so tall, too,' said Frank.

'I like the white ones best,' said Ernest.

'Oh, I don't; the red are much prettier,' said Frank.

'Well now, I think it's because they're growing together that they look so jolly,' said Ted.

'Very likely that's it; anyhow, they're very beautiful,' said Frank.

Mrs. Orington always talked to her children about birds and flowers and trees, and they were all more or less fond of them; but Frank especially loved flowers, and noticed them, and knew very many by name, so he gained more enjoyment out of a country ramble than most children.

'Well now, don't you think this is a jolly spot for our encampment?' said Ted as they reached a soft mossy little dell surrounded by big trees with great roots spreading out in all directions above ground, and looking very picturesque, with queer brown and grey mosses growing on them, and ferns clustering all round.

'Yes, splendid!' said the other two boys.

'Now, we'll tie Jack to one of the trees and unload him; and one of us must stay with the things while the other two go and find out where we can get water for the kettle. Now, who'll stay and mind the things?'

'I will, if you like, Ted,' said Frank.

'And Ernest and I will go and find the spring. I know it can't be very far off, for I remember seeing it last summer when I came here.'

So Ted and Ernest started off to find the spring,

Frank waiting.

and Frank went trotting all round the little dell and picking a flower here and a fern or bit of moss there, and Jack contentedly nibbled away at choice pieces of grass.

'Now, Jack, don't you think this is very jolly?' said Frank, and Jack pricked up his ears and looked up at hearing his name; but finding nothing was wanted of him, he began munching again, and Frank stood patting him and thinking what a capital arrangement it was, that there was always such a lot of grass for donkeys and ponies to eat just when they liked.

'What a good thing it would be now,' said Frank, 'if we could do just the same; it would save ever so much trouble, though to be sure it would be rather awkward to stoop so low for one's meals!' And after thinking the matter over, he came to the conclusion that after all it was perhaps pleasanter to eat one's dinner off plates at a table.

Frank soon began to think it was time Ted and Ernest came back, and he trotted out of the dell and looked about him, but couldn't see them. Then he shouted, 'Ted! Ernest! where are you?' but there was only the echo of his own voice, and Frank didn't quite like being all alone: everything was so still; nothing but the hum of insects, and not a leaf moving in the big trees.

'I do wish they'd come,' said Frank; 'and I'm

getting so hungry, and I can't open the baskets without them. That would be so greedy, but I should like something.'

Frank went back again to the dell and sat himself down at the foot of a great oak tree, looking rather woe-begone, and between ourselves, in another few minutes he certainly would have begun to cry, but just then he heard Ted's voice shouting out to him.

'Oh, Frank, did you think we were lost? Well, we really were, you know; for we soon found the spring, and were coming back, when I suppose we turned the wrong way, and we never found it out for ever so long, and couldn't make out where the dell was.'

'And we were getting so hungry, too,' said Ernest.

'And we thought what a thing it would be if we couldn't find you; and then you'd get all the eatables, you know, Frank, and we'd only the kettle,' said Ted.

'I don't think that would have been good to eat at all,' said Frank, laughing.

'Now then,' said Ted, 'let's unpack the baskets and see what there is for dinner.'

'Well, but you haven't told me how you got back,' said Frank.

'Oh, why, we turned back again and came to the spring, and then we knew where we were, don't you see?' said Ernest.

And now began the business of unpacking the

things. There was one large package with '*For dinner*' marked on it, and a smaller one '*For tea*,' that they put on one side.

'What's this, I wonder?' said Ted as he drew out something wrapped in a dinner napkin, and when it was undone there appeared a small raised pie. 'Oh! I know; it's one of cook's nice veal and ham pies; they're so good, Ernest.'

'It does look good,' said both the others.

Then another dinner napkin came to view, which contained a large pile of beautifully cut beef sandwiches, then a small bottle of home-made currant wine, then some raspberry puffs and a little custard pudding, and finally a basket of beautiful grapes and peaches.

'Oh, aren't they splendid?' said Frank.

'Beauties!' said Ernest. 'I never saw such big grapes.'

'Oh, they grow a lot of them at home, you know. I don't care very much for them; only they're cool to eat on a hot day,' said Ted.

They next laid a cloth on the grass, and put out the plates, knives and forks, and mugs, and placed all the good things ready to attack.

'Oh, I *am* hungry!' said Ted; 'aren't you?'

'Rather,' they both said, and very soon the pie had disappeared and most of the sandwiches, the custard, and the puffs; and they were making great

inroads upon the grapes and peaches, and sipping the currant wine.

'Well, what shall we do after dinner?' said Ernest.

'Let's run races,' said Frank.

'Or play hide-and-seek; and let's climb up into one of the biggest trees,' said Ted.

'Shouldn't you like to live in the woods always, like the Ancient Britons, you know?' said Frank.

'What, and dye oneself with the juice of fruits, and have one's hair long, and wear great beards like the pictures?' said Ted.

'Yes; wouldn't it be awful fun? And have coats made of the bark of trees, and stick feathers and beads all over us, and have rings in our noses and ears, and wear tiger skins and things. Oh, jolly, I think!' said Frank.

'Aren't you rather mixing up the Ancient Britons and the Indians, Frank?' said Ted.

'Oh, well, it's all the same, except perhaps that the Indians eat people. I shouldn't care for that part of it. I prefer veal pie, you know,' said Frank.

'So I should think,' said Ernest. 'Now I'm going to climb that tree and sit among the branches,' and up he went ever so high, followed by the others; and when they tired of that, they played all manner of games—hide-and-seek, horses, touch, and a dozen others, and fairly tired themselves out, and then had

a rest before proceeding to get the sticks to boil the kettle for tea.

'Now I'll wash the mugs and plates at the stream, and fill the kettle again; and you'll come with me this time, Frank, eh?'

'All right!'

'And Ernest, you will look for sticks, won't you, and pile them up for the fire?'

'Yes. Now don't get lost again, Ted, or I shall have my tea all by myself,' said Ernest.

'So you may; but, you see, you can't get any till we bring the kettle back;' and they all laughed.

Ernest soon collected plenty of sticks, and the others didn't get lost, so were back again in no time; and after some difficulty, they got the fire to burn, and presently the steam began coming out of the spout of the kettle; then Ted made the tea, having been previously instructed by cook; then they opened the parcel marked '*For tea*,' and found nice little rolls and butter, cakes and buns, all of cook's own making.

'Well, we have had a jolly time, Ted,' said Ernest with his mouth full of bun; 'haven't we, Frank?'

'Yes; it's the jolliest day I ever remember.'

'My holidays are ever so much pleasanter now I have you two to play with. I never cared so very much about them before. I was glad to go back to school, you know; but I'm not now.'

After they had finished their tea, they had to pack up the things ready to start for home, and the way the various things got pushed back into the panniers was certainly odd.

The remainder of the sandwiches somehow got into the kettle, and knives, forks, mugs, plates, rolls, butter, and buns were hopelessly mixed by the time Ted reached home and the panniers were given to cook to unpack. They were all very glad of Jack's help on the way back.

It was a glorious evening. A breeze had sprung up, and it was beautifully cool and pleasant. Mrs. Orington, true to her promise, met her boys about a mile from Lambton, bringing little Violet and Amy with her.

Ernest and Frank were eager to kiss 'dear Mudge,' and they all talked so fast, and all at the same time, that it was difficult to make out what they had been doing all day.

'Now, Violet,' said Ted, 'have a ride on Jack; I'll hold you on quite safely.'

'Oh, that's very nice! I was a little tired, and this is quite refreshing,' said Violet in her little old-fashioned way.

Amy could not be induced to get on Jack, for he'd no saddle, and so it was rather difficult to sit on his back comfortably with the two panniers; and she felt she was too big to be held on safely by Wilberforce.

It was all very well for Violet,' she said ; 'she was so small.'

Ted said good-night at Castlemans, promising to see Ernest and Frank next day.

The others soon reached home, and the boys were quite ready for bed, where we will leave them for the present.

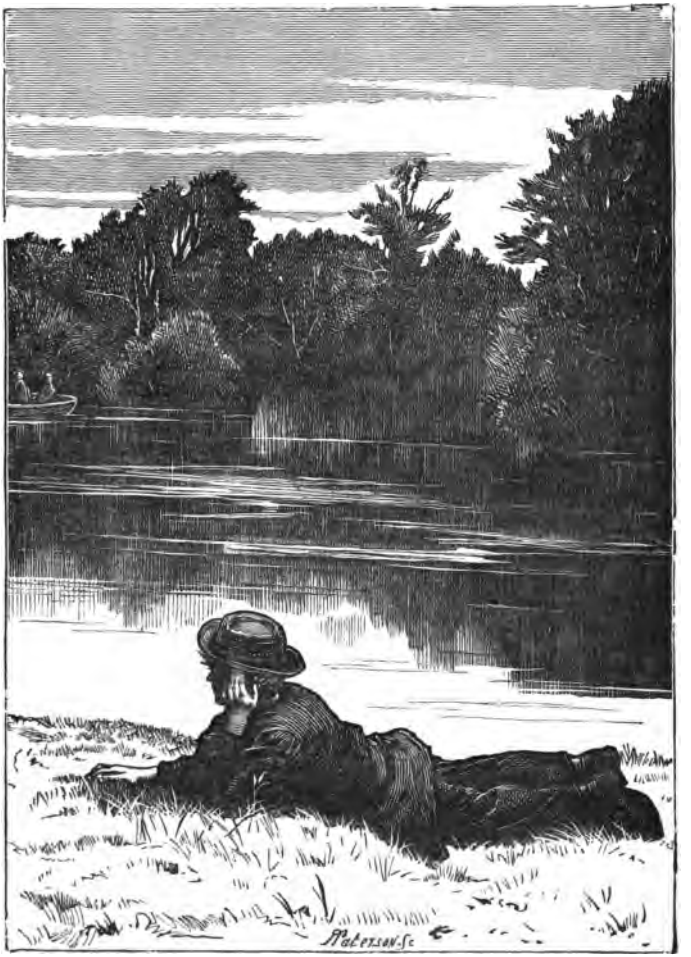
CHAPTER XIII.

A DAY AT CASTLEMANS.

THE three little Oringtons were asked to spend a day at Castlemans; and when Mrs. Wilberforce heard of the addition to the family at Lambton Hall, she at once included Amy in the invitation, who at first begged Mrs. Orington to let her remain at home with her, for she was shy of going anywhere among strangers; but Mrs. Orington told her that the more she went among other people, the sooner she would conquer her shyness.

'You know, dear Mrs. Orington, I am so clumsy at table still, that every one will laugh at me, though Ted Wilberforce is always very kind, and never seems to notice how stupid I am.'

'Indeed, Amy, you've improved very much, and Mrs. Wilberforce is the very last person to laugh at you, or allow others to do so; and she knows enough of your history to understand that you have much to learn which most children know when half your age, so I should really like you to go.'



Ted Wilberforce.

It was therefore settled that they should all four spend the day with Ted; and when the morning came, Amy was quite as eager as the others to start for Castlemans.

Ted Wilberforce was lying at full length on the brink of a piece of ornamental water, near the lodge gates, and ready to welcome his visitors as soon as they arrived.

'Oh, Ted, how pretty this water is!' said Violet 'it's so clear and blue. Isn't it lovely, Amy?'

'Indeed it is; and I can see the sky in it. But why are the trees all upside down?'

'Things always are reflected standing on their heads in water, you know,' said Ted.

'You see, Ted,' said Violet, 'Amy doesn't understand all these things as we do, and it makes her look rather silly; but we shall teach her in time, I've no doubt.'

Amy coloured painfully, but Ted Wilberforce smiled kindly, and said:

'Oh! there are lots of things I don't know either, Violet; so you must teach me too. Now let's follow those boys: they've rushed off round the water; and I want to show you all the boat I have.'

When they had caught up Ernest and Frank, Ted led the way to a little boat-house among the trees which overhung the water, and there was a new boat painted white and green, and named 'Violet.'

'Oh, isn't it jolly?' said Ernest.

'Oh, you are lucky, Ted, to have such a beautiful boat,' said Frank.

'And did you give her that name?' said Violet.

'Yes; of course, Leta. I named her in honour of you.'

'How very nice of you, Ted! And it has green cushions too! Oh! I do love it! Can you take me for a row?'

'No; I'm not allowed to go on the water without one of our men, you know. The groom and the gardener both know how to manage a boat; so when they've done their work, they take me. I hope we'll all be able to go in the evening, before you go home.'

'Oh, that's splendid!' cried the boys.

'Shall you like to go, Amy?' said Ted.

'Well, I think I shall be very frightened; but I'm sure it must be nice to float on that clear water. But shan't we all go down to the bottom?'

'Oh dear, no! Why should we, Amy?'

'Well, I can't see why the boat keeps on the top of water.'

'Why, Amy, of course because it's so light,' said Violet. 'It can't sink, you know. How silly of you!'

'It would soon sink if it got full of water, Leta,' said Ted.

'Oh, would it? Well, I hope the water will keep

out, then; for I shouldn't care to go to the bottom myself,' said Violet.

It took them quite a long time to thoroughly examine the boat; and when at last they had said all they could think of about boats and oars and sails, Ted took them round the flower garden, which was beautifully laid out and was a blaze of colour.

'Oh, how beautiful all these coloured trees are!' said Amy.

'Which?' said Frank. 'I only see green trees.'

'I mean all these little trees here,' said Amy, pointing to the beds of geraniums of various shades.

'Dear me, child,' said Violet, 'those are not trees; they're flowers.'

'I see the flowers,' said Amy; 'but aren't they growing on trees?'

'Well, we only call those plants, you know,' said Ted; 'and these,' pointing to some laurels, 'are shrubs.'

'I suppose I shall understand in time,' said Amy, sighing; 'but there seems so very much to learn.'

'Can't we have Jack to ride on, Ted?' said Ernest.

'Oh yes! Dear old Jack,' said Frank; 'do let's see him.'

'Come along, then; and when you've had some rides on him, I've something else to show you that I've had made—in fact, I've partly made it myself.

It's really more for you, Violet, and also Amy, than for us boys,' said Ted.

'Oh, whatever is it, Ted?' cried Violet and Amy in a breath.

'Well, it's something to do with Jack, you know,' said Ted.

'But he didn't help to make it, surely?' said Amy.

'Not exactly,' said Ted, laughing.

They had by this time reached the meadow where Jack was lazily browsing, and when Ted whistled, he trotted to him at once and put his head down to be rubbed.

'Dear old boy!' said Ted; 'now get your morning bit of sugar;' and the donkey pushed his nose into one of Ted's side pockets and brought out a big lump of sugar.

'Oh, you funny old thing!' said Violet. 'Fancy you liking sugar!'

'How does he know you've got the sugar, Ted?' said Ernest.

'Oh! I come every morning, you know, and give him a bit; so he's quite used to it.'

'It's very clever of him, I think,' said Violet.

'Isn't it too good to give a donkey?' said Amy.

'Too good for dear old Jack? Oh dear no; nothing's too good for him,' said Ted; 'is it, old boy?' And Jack looked up in his master's face as much as to say he quite agreed with him.

'Now, Jack, you've plenty of work before you; so have another mouthful of thistles before you begin,' said Ted. 'Now, Ernest, jump up and have a trot, and then you have one, Frankie, and I'll go and show Violet what I've done for her;' and Ted took her and Amy round to Jack's stable, and just inside the door was the most beautiful little cart with cushioned seats and everything complete.

Little Violet quite screamed with delight.

'You dear, kind Ted! And I'm to ride in this, and Jack will draw it and you'll drive? Oh, Amy, isn't it beautiful? And did you really make it, Ted?'

'Well, I only helped, you know. Rogers the gardener did most of it; and the wheels were made in Onslow; and then we got the varnish and the leather for the cushions, and I stuffed them.'

'Oh, you are clever!' said both the girls.

'Well, you get in, Violet, and I'll draw you round to the meadow and harness Jack. You'll run by the side, Amy, won't you? I'm afraid I couldn't draw it with both of you in.'

'No, I should think not,' said Amy; 'I'm much too heavy.'

When they got back to the meadow, Frank was having a trot, and Ernest, who was waiting for another turn, when he saw Ted coming, shouted out:

'I say, Frank, just look at Leta in her carriage,

and Ted's turned into a horse, and there's Amy running by the side like a big dog.'

'Oh, I say, isn't it fine?' said Frank as he trotted up on Jack. 'That is a pretty cart.'

'Now, boys,' called out Violet, 'come and help put Jack into my carriage. I'm going to have a drive. Now, Amy, get in.'

'Did you make the cart, Ted?' said Ernest.

'No; only helped Rogers. But I varnished all the wood-work, you know, and I stuffed the cushions; and the harness belonged to a pony they used to have a long time ago, and it just does for Jack. Now, then, off we go!' And Ted cracked his whip, and Jack trotted off round the meadow.

'Now, mind you don't fall out, Amy,' said Violet. 'You're not used to this kind of thing, you know.'

'I'm not likely to fall out, Violet; and I'm as much used to it as you, for you haven't been in it before, you see,' said Amy.

'Well, no, I haven't; but I'm used to going out in a carriage,' said Violet grandly.

'Doesn't Jack go well?' said Ted, looking back from his little front seat.

'Yes; it's lovely!' said Violet.

'I *do* like it so much, Ted,' said Amy.

'You must often come and drive round, then; for it's your cart, you know, Violet.'

When they got back to the boys, they were both eager that they should try the cart; so Ernest and Frank jumped in.

'Oh, it's jolly, Ted!' said Ernest. 'Don't you think I could drive Jack for a little time?'

'You may try, if you like, but don't upset us,' said Ted; and he gave the reins to Ernest.

Jack went on all right for a little while, and then he began to look round, as though he knew somebody else was driving him; then he stopped suddenly, and began to eat a nice thistle he saw.

'Well, that is cool now, isn't it?' said Ernest. 'Go on, Jack, directly;' but Jack finished eating and then began to look round again, and Frank and Ted laughed. Ernest did not quite like it, and felt rather cross, for Jack would not move. Then Ernest took the whip and gave him rather a sharp cut, and Jack started off very fast indeed, almost pulling the reins out of Ernest's hand; and then he stopped and suddenly began to back towards a ditch, and in another moment they would certainly have been bundled into the ditch had not Ted caught the reins.

'Come, come, old boy; what are you up to?' said Ted. 'Trying to upset your master, eh?'

Jack, who had come to a standstill the instant Ted spoke to him, now looked round for a moment, and then trotted off to where the two girls were standing.

'Jack's nearly killed us!' cried out Ernest.

'Yes; nearly *reposited* us in the ditch,' said Frank.

'I don't think we should have come to much harm,' said Ted, laughing.

'I'm not so sure about that, Ted,' said Ernest; 'he's a wicked Jack.'

'No; that he isn't! Only he didn't understand any one else driving him, you know,' said Ted.

'I'm very glad you've all come back safe,' said Amy.

'Yes, indeed! or we should have had to go back alone; and what would Mudge have said? And then Granny would have been so terrified,' said Violet.

Meanwhile Jack looked from one to the other and rubbed his nose against his master's shoulder, and evidently thought he had behaved very well.

Jack was worked very hard all the morning with the cart, but his master didn't again let any one else take the reins; and when dinner-time came, Jack was as hungry as any of the others, and Violet said she wished he could sit down to table with them.

'He couldn't do that very well,' said Ted, laughing. 'But we're going to have our dessert on the lawn under the trees, and Jack will come there, and you can feed him with as many sweet biscuits as you like.'

'Oh, that is nice!' said Violet. 'He seems to like all sorts of nice things; so do I.'

Mrs. Wilberforce gave the little ones a very nice dinner indeed, and they all seemed to appreciate it. There were many things Amy had never seen or heard of; but Ted and his mother managed so that she was not made to look or feel foolish during the meal.

When dinner was over, they all went out on the lawn; and under some beautiful shady trees, on one side, a table was spread with fruit and flowers for the little ones, where Mrs. Wilberforce said she would leave Ted to do 'the honours of the table,' after seeing them comfortably seated.

Amy was staring hard at all the fruit, for to her the splendid grapes, peaches, and pears were things unknown.

'Oh, there are some of those big grapes we had at Ashley Woods, Ernest!' said Frank.

'Yes; they were beautiful,' said Ernest; 'the best I ever had.'

'Oh, I love them!' said Violet, who was just squeezing an immense grape into her mouth from the bunch Ted had laid on her plate.

'How do you like them, Amy?' said Frank.

'Very much indeed, Frank. And what are those great soft-looking balls, all pink and white?'

'Those are peaches, Amy,' said Violet; 'and they've a big rough stone in the middle.'

'How do you know that, Violet?' said Amy.

'Because I've eaten peaches before. How soft you are, Amy!' said Violet.

'Do you mean a big stone out of the road?' said Amy. At this there was a burst of laughter from all except Ted, who hastened to explain that many fruits had stones in them.

'I'll take you into the kitchen garden, Amy, and show you a lot of different kinds that have stones in them. Let me give you one of these peaches to try; I know you'll like them.'

So Amy had one, and thought how beautiful it was, and wondered why she'd lived so long without either seeing or tasting such things before, and thought how hard it was for all those poor girls shut up in the orphan school.

When they had all finished their dessert, Ted took Amy to look at all the different fruits, and the others followed.

'Oh, I shall never know half of them,' Amy said as Ted showed her many kinds of plums, apples, pears, peaches, and grapes.

'You'll soon learn to know and like them too, Amy,' said Ted.

'What's all this yellow stuff, Ted?' asked Violet.

'Oh, it's mustard gone to seed, you know,' said he.

'I know. We set a lot of it in the spring, and cress too; and when it came up we had a lot for tea, and

we ate so much, because we'd grown it ourselves, you know, that we were quite bad,' said Frank.

'I'm sure I didn't eat so much, Frank; it was you,' said Violet.

'Oh, come now, that won't do! You had much more, and you were much worse after it.'

'Oh, well, if I did, you shouldn't say so, Frank,' Violet answered.

'There's a see-saw in the orchard, Ernest; shall we go and try it?' said Ted.

'Oh let's: I love a see-saw; don't you?' said Violet.

'I've never seen one,' said Amy.

'Come along; you shall see it and try it,' said Ted; and they all ran off to the orchard.

The see-saw, however, was not a great success, as may be imagined, for the little ones had all eaten a hearty dinner, and consequently the movement made them feel more or less sick; so it was soon given up, and they went and sat under the trees by the water's edge.

While they were resting there, laughing and chattering, Rogers the gardener passed by, and Ted called to him:

'Will you be able to row us presently?'

'Yes, Master Edward, directly after tea. I'll brush up and be ready by six o'clock, or half-past at the latest.'

'Very well, Rogers, that will do capitally. We shall be at the boat-house quite by half-past six; and then we shall have an hour and a half on the water before you go home,' said Ted, turning to Violet, 'for Mrs. Orington promised you might stay till eight o'clock this evening.'

'How delightful! I wish it was half-past six now,' said Violet; 'don't you, Amy?'

'I think I'm rather frightened of going down,' said Amy.

'Oh, nonsense!' said Ernest. 'We shall be all right; shan't we, Ted?'

'Yes, to be sure, as long as we keep still in the boat,' said Ted.

They were all too excited with the thought of going on the water to think much of tea, though the table under the trees was covered with dainty things for them. They soon went off to the boat-house, and were there almost before six o'clock.

The boat was all ready for them, just tied to a ring at the end of the house, and was about three or four feet from the shore.

'Wouldn't it be jolly to jump into the boat and sit there till Rogers comes?' said Ted.

'Oh, splendid!' they all cried; and Ted jumped in, got the boat close up to the shore, and helped Violet in; and after some little difficulty, Amy was persuaded to follow. Then Ernest and Frank

Violet rescued from drowning.

jumped in also, and Ted let go the rope, and the boat glided out to its former position.

'Isn't this nice?' said Violet. 'And just look at the water lilies.'

'How do they grow in the water?' said Amy.

'They're used to it, Amy,' said Frank.

'Oh! I wish I had one; they're so beautiful!' said Amy.

'You could easily get one,' said Violet; 'they're quite close;' and she stretched herself out of the boat, but found she couldn't quite reach it. In reaching over, the boat lurched a little on one side, and Amy thinking there was danger, gave a loud scream and jumped up from her seat to catch hold of Violet, who, she fancied, would go over. But the very action of getting up caused the boat to give a jerk, and Violet, who had more than half her body over the side, lost her balance, and with a shriek of terror fell over into the water. The boys were struck with horror; Amy turned pale as death, and was ready to faint. At that same moment Rogers bounded down to the water's edge, and walked in, and picked up Violet just as she was sinking.

'Oh, Ernest! Frank! she's dead, I know,' sobbed Amy, 'and I've done it!'

The boys were speechless; but Ted jumped on shore, and the others followed, and rushed after Rogers, who was running to the house with his

apparently lifeless burden. They met Mrs. Wilberforce, who had heard the shriek, coming from the house, and she soon saw what had happened, and telling Rogers to run to Mrs. Orington and beg her to come, she took little Violet in her arms, carried her to her own room, rang violently for her maid, and very soon had the child in a warm bath, and then wrapped in blankets on the sofa.

Violet soon opened her eyes and wondered what had happened.

'You fell into the water, darling,' said Mrs. Wilberforce.

'Oh, I know. I tried to get a water lily; but I'm quite well. Why, here's dear Mudge and Granny,' said Violet.

'I think she's all right,' said Mrs. Wilberforce. 'I thought it best to send word to you at once, when I knew what had happened; but I think she only fainted from the fright, for her clothes were scarcely wet through.'

'Why, little woman, how silly of you to get into the water!' said Mrs. Orington, kissing her.

'Now, Granny, don't look so terrified,' said Violet; 'the frogs haven't eaten me, you know.'

'Who did it, Violet?' said Mrs. Leslie. 'Was it that naughty Frank or Ernest, or did Amy push you in?'

'Oh dear, no, Granny! It was nobody's fault but

mine. I wanted a water lily, and as I stretched out over the side of the boat, I made it go on one side a little, and Amy got frightened and jumped up, and in I went. That's all I know, till I found myself here with Mrs. Wilberforce in this pretty room. Isn't it nice, Mudge?'

'Ah, just what I thought,' said Mrs. Leslie; 'it was that child, you see. I knew somebody had done it, poor little thing. This comes of taking care of other people's children, Annie; but there, my dear, my advice is never worth having!'

Mrs. Orington did not say anything to this remark, but began talking to Violet, and left Mrs. Leslie and Mrs. Wilberforce to amuse one another. Soon there was a knock at the door, and Ted asked if they couldn't come in, they were all so miserable.

'Oh, please do,' said Violet. 'I'm quite well, Ted; and I'm quite ready to go for the row, only I've no clothes to put on yet.'

'I think, chick, you must give up the row for this evening, and come home to bed as soon as your things are dry,' said Mrs. Orington.

Violet pleaded hard that, at any rate, the boys should not be disappointed in going in the boat; and when Mrs. Orington knew that Rogers would be with them, she consented that they should go for half an hour, notwithstanding various nods and

frowns from Granny, which meant that she didn't approve.

'Won't you go too, Amy?' said Violet.

'Oh no! indeed, I'd rather not! Please let me stay with you;' and Amy began to cry.

'Don't cry, Amy dear,' said Violet; 'I'm quite well, and I can have a row another day, you know.'

'Oh, but it was my fault; I was so frightened and silly, and indeed, indeed I didn't mean to do it,' sobbed poor Amy.

'We don't blame you in the least, dear; do we, Leta?' said Mrs. Orington kindly. 'So don't cry any more. It was very natural you should feel frightened, as you'd never been in a boat before.'

So Amy was pacified.

'Now I think we may go home. Let me help you on with your things, Leta.'

When they went down, they found that Mrs. Wilberforce had ordered the brougham round, for fear Violet might get chilled; so she was wrapped in a big shawl and carried into it, followed by Mrs. Orington and Amy.

Mrs. Leslie stayed to have a chat with Mrs. Wilberforce, and said she would return with the boys when they were ready.

'Oh, it has been so jolly!' cried Ernest as he and Frank burst into the room on their return from Castlemans, about an hour later.

'Hush, boys! Don't make a noise. Leta's asleep, and I don't want her to wake after all her excitement,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Is she all right, Mudge dear?' said Frank.

'Oh yes. After a night's rest, I expect she won't feel any the worse for her unexpected bath.'

The boys were then sent off to bed, and Mrs. Leslie began a small lecture to her daughter, as to the amount of trouble she was likely to have with Amy, and that if she had taken her advice she would not have undertaken such a burden.

Mrs. Orington cut the lecture short by saying, 'Well, Mother, I am doing simply what I consider an act of justice, and I must bear the consequences.'

CHAPTER XIV.

VIOLET'S SECRET.

IT was Mrs. Orington's custom to give her children two or three weeks at the sea-side before they returned to school in the autumn; and this year she thought it would be a good thing if Popsy joined them, for she was looking pale and ill, though she appeared to be cheerful. Uncle Percy had been to spend Sunday with his sister on several occasions since Christmas, but had not seen his cousin.

Mrs. Brooks and her niece were discussing the subject one night in Mrs. Orington's bedroom.

'Poor Popsy looks very bad, I think,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Yes, dear,' said Auntie Brooks. 'I don't think it's good for young people to be always poring over books; her father expects too much of her.'

'I don't believe study hurts any one,' said Mrs. Orington, who had studied a great deal herself, and could therefore speak from experience. 'I believe

it's nothing but because Uncle is so severe about her not seeing Percy. I can't think why he is so ridiculous about it; I shall fancy he dislikes Percy personally, and I am sure he has no reason to do so.'

'Nonsense!' said Auntie Brooks; 'it's only because he has a strong objection to cousins marrying.'

'Well, I consider he is going the way to make them marry, by separating them.'

'But Popsy would never marry without her father's consent.'

'And he would rather see Popsy miserable than give his consent?'

'Well, dear, I don't think you ought to put it in that way. He is acting for the best; and you know he is very clever, and always has good reasons for what he does.'

'I know he has acted for the worst so far, Auntie, and you can't deny it; for instead of forgetting each other, there's Popsy looking ill and miserable,—you know she is, though she tries to hide it,—and there's Percy always talking of Popsy. I am sure, whenever I see him I can get him to talk of nothing else.'

'It's a great pity,' said Auntie in a melancholy tone.

'Well, I think you'd better let Popsy come to the seaside with us, Auntie. Perhaps she'll get a little colour in her cheeks there. We think of going to Broadstairs for two or three weeks. Mother is going

down with Percy into Warwickshire while we're away, to stay with my eldest brother, as Percy has his holidays now, and Popsy will be company for me and help me to take care of the chicks. Do let her come, Auntie.'

'I'll ask Papa, dear, and I don't suppose he can have any objection. I'm sure it will do her good to get away from all the old books for a time; but I think I know what he'll say, because it was only this morning he was remarking about Percy having his holidays, and saying he supposed he'd be hanging about down here.'

'Kind of him,' said Mrs. Orington. 'If he's going to make an objection because he thinks Percy will be with us, you can set his mind at rest at once; for he's going into Warwickshire, as I told you, and certainly will not take the trouble to come to so quiet and unfashionable a place as Broadstairs. But if you like, I'll not tell him where we are going, and that will do away with any difficulty; so Uncle's mind can be set at rest about that beforehand.'

'Very well, my dear.'

'Not but what I think it is very foolish of him to make such a fuss, and I cannot myself see what harm there is in their meeting; but of course I am ready to do what Uncle wishes.'

'Is that Auntie?' said Violet, sitting up in bed and rubbing her eyes. 'What's the time, Mudge

dear?' Violet always wanted to know the time when she woke up.

'What has made you wake up, little one?' said Auntie Brooks.

'I generally wake when Mother comes to bed,' she answered, 'and have a chat; don't I, Mudge?'

'But it isn't bed-time yet,' said Mrs. Orington; 'so go to sleep again.'

'Oh! isn't it? I'm so disappointed; but it will be soon, won't it?'

'Yes, in half an hour. Now go to sleep, for I must go down and see Auntie off.'

Violet kissed her Auntie, and then she tried very hard to keep awake till her mother came up, because she had heard a good deal of the conversation, and she wanted to ask a great many questions. But notwithstanding all her trying, she fell asleep, and when she awoke the next morning she had forgotten all about the questions she meant to ask.

It was on the following day that Uncle Percy arrived at Lambton Hall to take his mother into Warwickshire. He was to stay a night, because they were to start early in the morning; and just before the late dinner, Violet asked him if he would give her a swing, because no one, she said, could do it as well as he did, for he was so tall and could push so high.

As they walked down the shrubbery towards

the swing, Violet said, with an air of great importance:

'Uncle, would you like to know a secret?'

'Why, what secret can you tell me, little one? Is it what I am going to have for dinner?'

'Of course not, Uncle,' she said, looking offended; 'it is something very secret.'

'Dear me!' said Uncle Percy, 'what can it be? Shall I guess again, or shall I give it up?'

'I'm not in fun at all,' said Violet, stretching up to her full height and trying to look very important. 'It's something I heard when I was asleep last night—I mean, you know, when I woke up.'

'Then I'm sure it's something wonderful,' said Uncle Percy, trying to look serious.

'I think we're going to the seaside,' said Violet.

'Yes, Granny said something about it; so that isn't a secret, is it?'

'No; I suppose not, as we always go. But Popsy's going too.'

'Oh! is she?' said Uncle Percy, really getting interested.

'Yes; because she looks so ill, poor thing, because Uncle Brooks won't let her see you.'

'Nonsense, Violet! Where are you going?'

'Ah, Uncle, that's my secret! You are not to be told, in case you come after Popsy.'

'So you won't tell me, as I'm not to be told?'

'Yes, I will. It's Broadstairs, where we went last year.'

'Oh! you are going to Broadstairs, are you? And do you think Cousin Popsy would like me to go, Leta, eh?'

'Yes, Uncle, I'm sure she would, and so should I, you know. I should like it very much, because you do have such jolly games with us.'

'But I'm going with Granny to Uncle Tom's, you know.'

'Yes,' said Violet mournfully; 'I only wish you were coming with us.' Then, after being silent a moment, and seeming to be in deep thought, as she stood holding one of the swing ropes and pushing it about idly, she exclaimed:

'I say, Uncle Percy!'

'Yes; what is it, Leta?'

'What relation would you be to me if you married Cousin Popsy?'

'You silly little girl, don't ask such funny questions.'

'But it's not a funny question. I can't quite understand it, because she's Cousin Popsy, and you're Uncle Percy; and if you married, what would you be then?'

'Why, of course I should still be Uncle Percy and whoever I marry will be your aunt.'

'Then should I have to call Popsy, Aunt?'

'Who told you I should marry Popsy?'

'Why, Mother says it's so silly of Uncle Brooks not to let you, because it makes you love Popsy more and more, and makes Popsy love you more and more.'

'What a funny little girl it is, to think about such things! Now, shall I give you a swing?'

'Oh! do, please, Uncle;' and Violet clambered up and seated herself in the swing, and her Uncle pushed it very high, and she kept exclaiming, 'Delicious!' But in the midst of this delightful occupation, delightful at least to Violet, the dinner bell rang, and Uncle Percy was obliged to go.

'I suppose you'll take the little ones to the sea-side this year as usual?' said Percy Leslie at dinner to his sister.

'Yes; we shall go as usual,' Mrs. Orington answered.

'And where do you go this time?'

'Oh, I shall choose some quiet place, where the children can really enjoy themselves;' and nothing more was said on the subject.

The next morning Granny and Uncle Percy left soon after breakfast, and travelled up to London, and then drove to Paddington Station, to go by the Great Western Railway to Warwick.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE SEASIDE.

THE morning after the arrival at Broadstairs the sun rose gloriously above the sea, and the little ones were in such a hurry to get down to the shore that they almost thought the time spent over breakfast wasted.

'Oh! bother breakfast!' said Violet; 'I want to get out, and eating is such a nuisance!'

'Well, I'm ever so hungry,' said Ernest; 'but I'd like to drink some milk and take a big lump of bread and butter, and run off and eat it by the sea.'

'Now, chicks, be a little patient. You'll have plenty of time to be by the sea, and you'll find you're very hungry down here—not that you do badly in that way at home,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Look at those fishermen pushing off their boats, Amy,' said Frank, who was looking out of the window by Amy's side.

'How queerly they're dressed! And one of them has such an odd-looking red thing on his head,' said Amy.

'Oh, they always have those thick blue woollen shirts, you know, and lots of them wear those red caps. I wish we were going in the boat with them, the sea looks so jolly,' said Ernest.

'How it sparkles in the sunlight!' said Frank. 'And just watch those men rowing, and see the water that drips from the oars as they take them out; it looks just like the diamonds in Mudge's rings.'

'The sea's far more beautiful than any diamonds, Frankie,' said Mrs. Orington; 'but come now and have your breakfast, and then we'll all go out.'

Mrs. Orington had taken a little house standing on the cliff above the church. There was a small garden round it, with a few trees and a seat; and beyond the low stone wall there was a corn-field, sloping downwards to the edge of the cliff. Below could be seen the old pier; and stretching round to the right were the white cliffs, which shut in the little bay, where the sand was soft and yellow, and where all the pleasure-boats lay. Above, on the cliffs, were the various lodging-houses facing the sea, and behind lay the little town; while to the left, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but the bright blue rippling sea.

'Isn't it a charming view, Popsy?' said Mrs. Orington as they stood at the bow window after breakfast; 'and doesn't the fresh sea air make you feel better already?'

Fishermen pushing their boats off to sea.

'Yes, that it does,' answered Popsy just a little sadly.

'It will soon put some colour into these pale cheeks of yours, dear, and we'll take you home looking quite a different girl,' said Mrs. Orington.

As soon as Mrs. Orington had seen the landlady and given her orders for dinner, they all started off for the sands; and soon Amy was standing for the first time in her life on the sea-shore, with the water rippling up and turning over in tiny wavelets close to her feet.

Mrs. Orington was watching her, and presently, as she said nothing, asked her, 'Well, Amy dear, what do you think of it all?'

At the sound of her voice, Amy started as if waking from a dream, the tears filled her eyes, and she said, drawing a deep breath, 'Oh, it's very beautiful. I never thought there was anything in the world so beautiful as this.'

Ernest, Frank, and Violet had dragged Popsy off between them to find a nice place to make a castle, and when Mrs. Orington and Amy came up to them, they had already commenced their operations.

'Oh, what *are* you going to do?' said Amy.

'Why, build a castle, of course,' said Violet. 'Come and help us; we've got an extra spade.'

'How pretty it is!' said Amy, taking up a hand-

ful of sand and letting it run slowly through her fingers; 'so soft and bright!'

'Never mind that,' said Frank, 'but help me to dig a channel here for the water to run up presently and fill our moat.'

'Will the water come up here?' said Amy.

'Yes, when the tide comes in, you know,' said Ernest; 'but that won't be yet for some time.'

'But is it safe to stop here, then?' said Amy.

'Oh, you silly!' said Violet; 'we can run away as it comes up.'

'But how high will it come?' said Amy doubtfully.

'As high as that line of sea-weed you see there,' said Mrs. Orington. 'That was left behind by the tide when it went down, you know, and it will come up as far again in a few hours.'

'Oh yes,' said Amy; 'I've learnt all about the tides: I understand now.'

Mrs. Orington and Popsy were sitting near the children, working and listening to the little ones chattering, and sometimes talking with them, and making suggestions about the erection of the castle.

'Isn't it getting big now, Mudge?' said Violet as she brought a pailful of damp sand and turned it out on a heap that Ernest and Frank were getting into shape. They had dug a deep trench round a square piece of sand, and were now busy making the castle walls.

'Let's get them very high, Ernie,' said Frank; 'it'll be all the more fun when the sea comes up and washes them down.'

'All right,' said Ernest; 'and we'll have a tower at each corner, and a big one in the middle.'

'Oh, won't that be nice, Amy?' said Violet.

'Yes, very; only I don't see the use of making it all so nice just to be washed away again,' said Amy.

'But we can make another to-morrow, don't you see; and it's half the fun to watch the sea knocking down first one tower and then another,' said Frank.

They all went on working hard at the castle walls and towers, when suddenly Amy said:

'I wonder what's on the other side there?'

'Where?' the children asked.

'I mean the other side of the sea,' said Amy. 'I wish I'd a map here to look where we are, and find out the latitude and longitude of Broadstairs.'

'Oh, bother latitude and longitude!' cried Ernest; 'and never mind what's on the other side.'

'We've got the jolly sea here, anyhow,' said Frank.

'And do let's forget lessons and those long things you were talking about,' said Violet.

'But I like to know where I am,' said Amy.

'Why, you're *here*, of course; isn't that enough?' said Frank, and they all laughed.

'You're quite right, Amy dear,' said Mrs. Orington,

'and you chicks will none of you ever be as clever as Amy if you don't think a little more. We'll look at a map when we go in, and see exactly where we are.'

'Now, Frank, dig a channel down to the water, and join it to our moat so that we can get it full,' said Ernest.

The tide was now coming in, and soon ran into Frank's channel, and then into the moat, and Violet clapped her hands and danced round the castle.

'Here it is; it's all round the castle now, and we can only get in across the drawbridge; isn't it lovely, Amy?'

'Yes, very,' she said. 'How fast it's coming in now! It will soon overflow the moat. Oughtn't we to dig it deeper?'

'Yes, of course,' said Ernest, and they shovelled out the sand; but the sea was too quick for them, and gradually drove them farther back.

'Now the water's getting up to the walls, and when it's reached the top it will flow over; then there'll be only the towers above water,' said Frank.

'There goes one tower!' cried Violet.

'There goes another!' said Amy.

'I wonder how long the middle one will last?' said Ernest.

'Oh, ever so long; it's so big and strong,' said Frank.

'Come, now,' said Mrs. Orington; 'it's time we were on our way home to dinner.'

'Oh, Mudge dear, do wait till the towers have all gone!' cried Violet.

'There go the other two little ones!' said Amy.

'Now there's only the middle one, and see how the water's washing away the bottom of it,' said Ernest.

In another moment there was a shout from them all as the last vestige of their morning's work disappeared under the quickly advancing tide. Then off they rushed after Mudge and Popsy, who were some little distance across the sands on their way home.

'We'll build one ever so much bigger and higher to-morrow,' said Ernest.

'I wish Ted was here,' said Violet.

'So do I,' and 'So do I,' they all said.

In the afternoon, Ernest wrote a letter to Ted, and told him how they'd arrived safely at Broadstairs, and how jolly it was, and how much they all wished he was there too.

Poor Ted Wilberforce was so dull after the departure of the little Oringtons, and begged so hard to go to Broadstairs, that after some little persuasion, his mother said she would go with him for a fortnight. He at once wrote off to Ernest with the welcome news that he was going to them in a few days.

Great was the delight of them all when Ted's letter arrived.

'That's splendid!' said Violet.

'Shan't we have fun now?' cried Ernest and Frank.

They had scarcely been a week at Broadstairs when Ted Wilberforce and his mother arrived, and the same evening they had all a walk together on the sands, Violet starting off hand in hand with Ted, and chattering away as though they'd been separated for months.

The little Oringtons were very fond of inventing names for the various people they saw about, and they were not always very complimentary. They had already nicknamed several visitors at Broadstairs, and during the walk above mentioned Violet was telling Ted about them.

'There! Look at that long thin man, Ted, with his hat right on his nose. We call him "the ass;" doesn't he look like one, now?'

'That he does; but look at the one behind him,' said Ted.

'Oh yes,' said Violet, bursting with laughter; 'isn't he a one, sticking himself out like that, and with his hat on the back of his head, and that eye-glass always stuck in his eye? We call him "the idiot." And oh! But look here at this dear old man; he's "Frank's friend," you know.'

Violet and Ted

'Why?' asked Ted.

'Oh, Frank's always talking to him; and he's told Frank his history, and Frank tells him all about us, and they have long chats. Frank's always picking up people like that.'

'Yes; I see,' said Ted.

The boys now joined them, and said Violet shouldn't have Ted all to herself.

They all enjoyed their walk immensely, and went home as the moon was rising over the sea, and making a long strip of silver light across the water.

'I should like to be in a boat and row just up and down that streak of silver,' said Amy.

'Yes; it would be delightful!' they all said; but Mrs. Orington came up just then, and reminded them it was past bed-time, and they must all go in.

So they said good-night to Ted, after arranging with him to build a great big castle on the sands in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE.

OUR little party had now been at the seaside about ten days, all enjoying themselves very much. They looked sunburnt and healthy. Even Popsy looked quite well now; for, although she could not see Percy Leslie, she knew he had not forgotten her, as Violet had taken good care to tell her, *as a great secret*, all she had told Uncle Percy.

'And I *did* tell Uncle where we were coming!' she added with great triumph.

'Did you?' said Popsy. 'That wasn't right.'

'I thought it *was* right, Cousin Popsy, because Mother said she didn't see why Uncle Brooks shouldn't let you see Uncle Percy; and Mother's always right, isn't she?'

'Of course she is, darling,' and Popsy kissed her, and talked about something else.

Now, to tell the truth, Popsy thought a great deal about this little conversation, and wondered whether

her cousin Percy would come to Broadstairs. She couldn't help thinking sometimes that perhaps he would; and when she was out on the sands, she often used to look about as if she half expected to see him. But day after day passed, and now they had been there ten days, and she began to think how silly she was to suppose he would come.

They were all on the sands one morning, the children playing, and Mrs. Orington and Popsy reading, when they saw the old man whom they always called Frank's friend coming towards them with something in his hand. Frank was very fond of speaking to people in the street, and often made acquaintances in this way. Frank got up to meet his friend, and ask him how he was.

'I'm pretty well, young gentleman, thank you, as well as my old bones will ever let me be. I'm getting old and bent, and can't expect to feel very bright again in my life. I've just picked up this neck-cloth; does it belong to any of you young people? There's a mark of some sort on it here; but I can't rightly make it out without my spectacles.'

'I think it must belong to one of us,' said Frank, 'for I've seen it before; but I can't remember whose it is. Shall I take it to Mother and ask her?'

'Yes, do,' and he handed it to Frank.

'Look here, Mother,' said Frank; 'my old gentleman has found this. Doesn't it belong to us?'

'I seem to know it,' said Mrs. Orington, 'and yet I don't think it's mine. Just ask Ted Wilberforce if it's his; he's over there.'

Frank carried it to Ted, who knew nothing about it, neither did Ernest; and then Frank said, 'The old gentleman said something about a mark; let's look for it, Ernest.'

'"P. B. L.,"' said Ernest. 'Why, that's Uncle Percy's initials.'

Meanwhile Popsy's face had become very red and then pale, at least as pale as the sun-burn would allow it to be, and she was trying to look as if she knew nothing about it. But she had good reason to know a great deal about it, for she had bought the kerchief herself as a birthday present for Percy nearly two years ago, and marked it herself also.

Frank went running with it to his mother.

'Why, Mudge,' he said, 'Ernest says it's Uncle Percy's; and here's "P. B. L." in the corner. However did my old man get it?'

'So it is,' said Mrs. Orington. 'Why, of course, I remember it now,' and she turned to Popsy to see what she had to say on the subject.

Popsy was blushing very much now, and Mrs. Orington said:

'Do you recognise it?'

'Yes,' she answered; 'I gave it to him. What can it mean?'

Uncle Percy's neckerchief.

'Well, I suppose it means,' said Mrs. Orington, recovering her surprise and looking very mischievous, 'that Percy gave it away to somebody else, and that somebody else has lost it.'

'I don't think so,' said Violet, who had joined them, and was looking very knowing. 'I think it means that Uncle Percy is here. Oh, how delightful! Won't we have some fun now? Let's go and find him.'

'You silly child! as if your uncle could be here. Why, he's down in Warwickshire, and I had a letter from Granny yesterday saying he was enjoying his visit very much.'

'But then, Mudge, perhaps he thought he'd like a change, and has come here to-day.'

'Go and ask your friend where he found it, Frank.'

But as Frank turned to look for his friend, he shouted, 'Here is Uncle Percy! Hooray!' and all the children shouted 'Hooray!' and perhaps Popsy would have liked to join in, but of course that wouldn't be proper for a grown-up young lady.

Mrs. Orington got up and met him, and said: 'What have you come here for, you bad boy?' and she tried to look very serious.

'Why, you don't seem glad to see me,' he said, laughing.

'Of course I'm not, when I've promised to keep

you a couple of hundred miles out of the way. What will Uncle say?'

'Uncle can't object to my getting a little sea air, surely?'

'Yes; he objects very much to your getting it at the same place as some one else.'

'Then where am I to go for it? To the Sandwich Islands or the Cape of Good Hope?'

'Yes; I think either would please your uncle. But did Granny tell you we were here? She said she wouldn't.'

'Oh dear, no! I don't depend on Granny for my information. I've got a little bird all to myself, who tells me what's happening,' and he looked mysterious.

Mrs. Orington wondered whether Popsy had written, but she thought it unlikely, as she always obeyed her father so strictly.

When Uncle Percy had greeted the children all round, and spoken to Popsy, who had not seen him for a very long time, and who was only too glad to see him now, Mrs. Orington led him away from the rest and said:

'Now, Percy, Uncle will be very angry if he hears of this. Don't you think it would be wiser to go?'

'I don't think anything of the kind, Annie. I am not going to be bullied by Uncle any longer. I may come down here if I like, and I *do* like, and it's no good to scold me for it. You know you don't

agree with Uncle about it, and that you see how foolish it is of him. If I thought Popsy had forgotten me, I wouldn't come: I should consider it a point of honour to keep away; but my little bird tells me Popsy hasn't by any means forgotten me.'

'Who can it be?' thought Mrs. Orington, little supposing it was Violet who had done all the mischief.

'Well, if you stay, you must take the consequences with Uncle. I shall not tell him anything about it; but of course, when the children go back, they'll be sure to talk about it; and I am not going to tell them not to, because it's not right to burden children with secrets.'

'No; they can't keep them,' said Percy, looking amused.

So Uncle Percy joined the happy party at Broadstairs, and a very pleasant time they all had for the next ten days. They made all sorts of expeditions, sometimes on donkeys, and sometimes driving, and sometimes walking; and Uncle Percy took care of Popsy, and Ted Wilberforce of Violet, and Ernest of Amy, and Frank said proudly that he took care of 'Mudge.'

But these ten happy days came to an end, as all happy days will; and every one of the party was sorry when they did, for they all said they had never enjoyed themselves so much before.

Popsy had such rosy cheeks, and looked so fat and well, that Mrs. Orington declared Auntie Brooks would not know her; and Amy Gray looked quite a different child. She had met with one adventure while at the sea which is worth recording. One day when the whole party had walked over to Ramsgate, Amy suddenly met four of her schoolfellows on the sands. They were dressed in the hideous school uniform, and looked very ill and thin, and were with a shabby-looking old woman. Any one passing them would have probably thought they were workhouse children, and have taken no further notice. But Amy knew them very well, and turned red, and ran up to Mrs. Orington and said:

'There are some of my schoolfellows; I needn't speak to them, need I?'

'Why not?' said Mrs. Orington.

'I feel so ashamed to,' said Amy, looking down.

'Why, dear?'

'Because they look so dreadful.'

'Poor children!' said Mrs. Orington; 'you mustn't despise them for that. Go up at once and speak to them.'

Amy went up to them, and one said, 'Hullo, 241, how are you?'

It certainly was not pleasant for a well-dressed girl like Amy, who was with friends, to have to walk

up to these children and be addressed, loud enough for every one to hear, as 241.

They informed her that they had been seriously ill, and the committee had sent them to Ramsgate.

Amy felt very much ashamed at first, but presently Violet came up and spoke to them, and the boys also; and then Mrs. Orington gave them some money to spend, and they each made a curtsey and thanked her very much. And when all Amy's friends were so kind, Amy could not help feeling very proud of them; and she saw her schoolfellows looking at her pretty clothes, and that made her feel proud also.

'You must never be ashamed of speaking to any one,' said Mrs. Orington, 'because it's not fine clothes that make us better than others. Those little girls are quite as good as you, I daresay, only they're not so lucky.'

Our happy little party returned to London and soon separated. Popsy went home to Rose Bank, and Ernest and Ted went to school, and Frank and Violet began to walk to Onslow every day to school, and Amy was to have lessons with Mrs. Orington till Christmas. They all found it very hard to go to work again.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER NEW-COMER.

NOT long after their return from Broadstairs, Violet realized one of her fondest wishes. Mrs. Leslie was expected home from Warwickshire, and Frank and Violet were watching for her at the gates.

Mrs. Orington had gone to Lambton station to meet her mother, and Amy was busy doing some needlework in the house.

'Don't you wish we were back at Broadstairs, Frank?' said Violet.

'Don't I, though, instead of going to school again every day! It's horrid; and I can't learn my lessons a bit now,' said Frank.

'I do like our garden, though, and these rows of big trees down to the gates. We couldn't have all that at Broadstairs, could we?' said Violet.

'Well, I suppose not. We couldn't have the house taken there, I'm afraid; and I don't see how the trees could be pulled up very well.'

'And then the train wouldn't be big enough to carry them, you know, Frank; so we'd better let them alone, I think; don't you?'

'Yes; I think so too, Violet.'

'Here comes Granny!' cried out Frank.

'And whatever *has* Mudge got? Let's run out to meet them,' said Violet, and they both rushed through the gates into the road.

Frank, Frank!' shouted Violet; 'it's my doggie, my doggie! Look, look! Mudge's leading him by a string!'

'How splendid! What a big fellow he is!' said Frank.

'And how are my little pets?' said Mrs. Leslie, as she kissed first one and then the other. 'How bonnie you both look after your trip to the sea! And now look what I've brought home.'

'Oh, Granny dear, what a beauty! what a lovely curly coat! and he's so big and tall!' said Frank, stroking him.

'Let me stroke him, Frank,' said Violet, dragging at the 'doggie's' head to get a good look at him.

'What's his name?' said Frank.

'"Ned," your Uncle Tom called him. And he said we'd better not alter his name, because he's used to it, and wouldn't understand another; but it's not very pretty,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Come along, chicks; Granny's tired, and wants

her dinner. Here, Frank, take the chain and lead Ned home. Run on, both of you,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Where's Amy?' asked Mrs. Leslie.

'I asked her to do some needlework for me,' said Mrs. Orington. 'She's so improved since you saw her.'

'Well, I'm glad of it. She's been a great deal of trouble one way and another,' said Mrs. Leslie.

As they went through the gates into the avenue, Amy was coming towards them; and Mrs. Leslie could not but notice the great improvement in her looks, and she greeted her very kindly.

'How are you, Amy dear? You look wonderfully well after your visit to the sea; how did you like it?'

'Oh, so very much; it was all so beautiful,' said Amy.

'Come and look at my dear doggie, Amy,' said Violet.

'Isn't he a beauty?' said Frank. 'He's *my* doggie.'

'Well, chicks, you're claiming him; but, you know, your Uncle Tom sent him as a present to me, so really he's my doggie.'

'Oh, well, it's all the same,' said Violet. 'We can play with him, can't we, Mudge?'

'I like him very much,' said Amy. 'What's he called?'

'Ned,' said Frank and Violet together.

'But what sort of dog is he? I've often heard your mother talk of different kinds, you know,' said Amy.

'Oh, never mind; he's a dear brown curly doggie,' said Violet. 'And do you see what lovely big paws he has, all spotted brown and white?'

'And look at his long silky ears,' said Frank, taking one in his hand and stroking it.

'But he's no tail,' said Amy.

'My goodness, he hasn't!' shouted Frank.

'Let's go and ask Granny what he's done with it,' said Violet, rushing off after Mrs. Leslie and her daughter.

Granny told them that Uncle Tom said that was one of the special marks of beauty in Ned, that he was a Cocker spaniel, and they never had more than an inch or two of tail.

'Well, anyhow, he's a love without a tail!' said Violet.

'I like him all the better,' said Frank; 'tails are so in the way, you know.'

Ned did not get a moment's rest until the little ones were sent off to bed, when he stretched himself on the rug in the drawing-room, at Mrs. Orington's feet, with a sigh of relief.

The next morning the children were up very early to have a little game with Ned before they started off to school; and they raced round the

garden with him, and rolled on the grass; and Ned was evidently well pleased with his new playmates, and they with him.

Soon after breakfast, Mrs. Brooks came to have a chat with her sister, and hear all the latest news from Warwickshire.

'Why, my dear, you don't mean to say you've a dog?' said Mrs. Brooks as Ned jumped up to look at the visitor.

'Yes; Tom had bought him for Annie, and though I don't like dogs as a rule, he persuaded me to bring him up,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'You really brought him in the train with you? Bless me, my dear, I should have been frightened out of my life; and getting down here, too, from London! I wouldn't have done it on any account,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'Why, Tom put him in the train, you know, and saw that he was comfortable; and then when I got to Paddington, the guard looked after him and brought him to me, and I'd only to jump into a cab and drive to Waterloo; and from there I had Ned in the carriage with me, and he was as good as gold,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Well, my dear, *I* wouldn't have done it; and he's none too much of a beauty, now you have got him; without any tail to speak of, too.'

'No; go away; I don't want you,' said Mrs.

Brooks as Ned came and put one great paw on her lap and looked up as if to say, 'Come, be friends.'

'Well, Auntie dear, what do you think of Ned?' said Mrs. Orington as she came into the room. 'The chicks are wild with delight, and they each claim him as "My doggie."'

'Well, Annie love, I don't care for great dogs in a room; they're always in the way, and in the winter they want the whole of the hearthrug to themselves,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'He won't get it here, for my chicks are so fond of it themselves that Ned will only get a very small corner. You'll have to be content with that, old boy,' said Mrs. Orington, patting Ned's soft brown head.

'Well, my dear, I have a dog too,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'Why, really, Auntie, and after making such a fuss about mine. What's he like, and when did he come?' said Mrs. Orington.

'He's a little King Charles. A friend of your uncle's in town sent him to me for a present, so I couldn't well refuse to keep him. He's very small, you know, and won't be a worry,' said Mrs. Brooks.

Mrs. Leslie, who had left the room, now came back with her bonnet on, saying:

'I have just to walk into Onslow, Maria love; will you come with me, and we'll take Ned for a run?'

'Very well, Kitty,' said Mrs. Brooks. 'I hope the dog won't be a trouble to us.'

So the two ladies started off for their walk, and reached Onslow in safety, Ned behaving beautifully, trotting by the side of one and then the other, and looking up in their faces from time to time approvingly; as well he might, when he was walking with two such handsome and well-dressed ladies.

Mrs. Leslie soon finished her shopping; and as the sisters turned to retrace their steps, two little figures came bounding after them.

'Goodness me! Maria, look here! Oh, you dreadful children, where have you been? what have you been doing?' said Mrs. Leslie as Frank and Violet stopped, panting before her.

'We haven't been anywhere, Granny,' said Frank.

'Why, what's the matter? You look quite terrified, Granny,' said Violet.

'Terrified indeed, child! Now, pray don't laugh, Maria,' said Mrs. Leslie, turning to her sister, who was trying very hard to be serious, and found it difficult.

'Violet, where are your gloves? And your jacket is unfastened, and your hat all on one side, and your face anything but clean, and both your frock and Frank's clothes are splashed in a disgraceful way with something.'

'Are they, Granny? Oh, I didn't know it! I think I've lost my gloves, and I forgot to button my jacket,' said Violet.

'I suppose we got dirty watching the house that's

being built at the other end of the town,' said Frank. 'I thought I should so like to help, you know; and one of the men let me lay some bricks: he was so kind, Granny, you know. And then Violet said she wanted to put a brick on, and so he let her; and as we came away I wasn't quite looking where I walked, you know, and one foot went plump into some mortar or something, and it all splashed up over us, and the man tried to clean us a bit with his pocket-handkerchief.'

'Good gracious!' said Granny. 'Fancy my grandchildren turning bricklayers! Horrible idea! You're not at all like gentlemen's children, and I'm quite ashamed of you. Pray walk on in front, or else behind; I can't own you when you're so dirty.'

Just as they were getting out of the town, they had to pass a public-house, where a group of rough men were laughing loudly round the door, and a large shaggy dog was with them.

Ned was having a run in the road, and as he got near the group of men, their dog made a rush at him, barking and growling very unpleasantly.

'Ned, Ned, come here!' called Mrs. Leslie; but poor Ned had to defend himself, for the dog had regularly set upon him.

'Why don't you separate them,' said Mrs. Leslie to the men, 'instead of standing there looking on like a set of idiots? Call the dog off, some of you.

I didn't bring my beautiful Ned all the way from Warwickshire yesterday to be eaten up by a great savage brute.'

The dog was called off, and Ned was not really any the worse, but, as Violet said, 'Granny was terrified.' Mrs. Leslie ran into a shop close by, followed by the others.

'Please, Mrs. Smith, have you a piece of string? I must lead my dog. He's been nearly killed by a great savage dog, and I only brought him from Warwickshire yesterday; it's dreadful!' said Mrs. Leslie.

The string was produced, and Mrs. Leslie fastened it to Ned's collar, and they all started again. Whether Ned was in a hurry for his dinner, or whether he objected to the string, or whether he did it out of pure mischief, was never known; but as soon as he found that Mrs. Leslie was holding a string fastened to his collar, off he started at a trot, and as he was very strong, Mrs. Leslie could not help following.

'Stop, stop, Ned!' she said; 'don't go so fast.'

But Ned only went all the faster, and Frank and Violet ran after, followed by Mrs. Brooks, who was, as she afterwards said, 'shaking with laughter at seeing poor Kitty being dragged along by that great dog.'

Faster and faster Ned rushed along, evidently enjoying it immensely.

'Poor Granny!' said Frank; 'her face is getting so red.'

'How warm she must be, Frank!' said Violet. 'Really, you know, this is very amusing; isn't it?'

'Yes, jolly,' said Frank. 'Granny will get home long before we shall. And look at Auntie coming behind; isn't she laughing?'

Mrs. Leslie reached Lambton Hall, and sank into a big oak chair in the lobby quite exhausted.

'Why, whatever is the matter, Mother?' said Mrs. Orington, coming out of the drawing-room. 'You're quite out of breath, and you've such a red face.'

'And so would you, Annie, if you'd been dragged home by that great dog of yours.'

'Dragged home!—why?' asked Mrs. Orington.

The two little ones here ran in, and then came Mrs. Brooks, and between them they told Mrs. Orington the adventure of the morning.

'And you should just have seen Granny, Mudge dear, how angry she was with those men,' said Violet.

'And she told them not to stand there like a set of idiots, but to separate the dogs,' said Frank.

'It was really beautiful, Kitty love, as good as a play,' said Mrs. Brooks, laughing.

'It really wasn't anything to laugh at then,' said Mrs. Leslie; 'but I did laugh as Ned dragged me home, for I felt how absurd we must have looked.'

'Yes; it was great fun,' said Violet.

'I certainly shall not take Ned into Onslow again,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Oh! by the bye, children,' said Mrs. Brooks, 'I've something for you to see at Rose Bank, so you must come one half-holiday very soon.'

'Oh, what is it, Auntie? what is it?' they said.

'It's a little wee dog, dears.'

'Why, Auntie, I thought you couldn't bear dogs?' said Frank.

'Well, dear, I don't care for them very much, but I had this one sent me,' said Auntie.

'What's it like? black or white, or what?' said Violet.

'It's black and brown, and it's called Flossie, and it's a King Charles,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'But why has it two names?' said Frank.

'What do you mean, dear? Its name is Flossie, you know.'

'Yes; but you said King Charles as well,' said Frank.

'Oh, I understand. It's called a King Charles, just as your Ned is called a Cocker spaniel, you know—that's the name of the breed; and Flossie is what *I* call it,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'And why are they called King Charles's?' said Violet.

'Because they were very fashionable in the time of Charles II.; and he was very fond of them, and

had a great many about with him always,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'Now, chicks, do you understand all about it? You always ask so many questions,' said Mrs. Orington.

'And I've also something else for you to see,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'Something alive?' said Frank.

'Yes, and so playful,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'I know; it's a kitten. Now, isn't it, Auntie?' said Violet. 'And I do love a little kitten so.'

'That's it; and it's a Tabby, with a good deal of white in it,' said Auntie. 'It was a little stray thing that asked to be taken in, because it hadn't any home; so we took it, though we didn't want a cat. However, it is generally in the kitchen, or in Mrs. Dawson's room.'

'Oh, shan't we have a jolly time of it at Rose Bank, with the doggie and the kitten, Frank?' said Violet.

'Yes, splendid!' said Frank. 'I wish we were going now.'

'You shall come very soon, dears; but you mustn't bring Ned with you on any account,' said Mrs. Brooks.

'Why ever not, Auntie?' asked Frank.

'Because he's so big, he might swallow up my little wee Flossie in no time. And now I must run home to lunch,' and Auntie Brooks said good-bye to them all and tripped away down the avenue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAD FATE OF DIANA BLACKAMOOR.

POPSY had not told her father that Percy Leslie had been to Broadstairs. She mentioned it to her mother, and asked her advice.

'Leave it to me, my dear,' Mrs. Brooks had said, and so it was left.

Violet and Frank went to Rose Bank one Saturday to see the little spaniel Flossie and the new kitten Dick, and Auntie Brooks invited them to stay to tea.

Old Mrs. Dawson, who had been in Mrs. Brooks' service ever since she married, and had indeed served her mother before her, and had nursed Popsy and brought her up, prepared tea for the little ones in a room where she was accustomed to sit and work; for she was no longer capable of much active service, and was now housekeeper and confidential servant. Her room was a very comfortable one, and the children might make as much noise as they liked

there, because it was out of sound of Mr. Brooks' book-room. Here they found the new cat Dick, a very fine young kitten of about four months old.

'Oh, he is a beauty!' said Violet. 'Aren't you glad to have him, Mrs. Dawson?'

'He's almost too playful for me, Miss; he wants you young folk with him.'

Violet took him up and carried him about like a baby.

'Now, Violet,' said Frank, 'let me have him a bit;' but Violet didn't seem inclined to part with him.

'Mayn't I have him, Mrs. Dawson?' said Frank.

'Now, don't quarrel over him, my dears, but let Violet have him before tea, and you shall have him after. He's great friends with old Tim, the neighbour's cat, who, they say, is ten years old; but he plays with him as though they were both kittens.'

'How kind of him!' said Violet. 'I wonder what they say when they meet. Tim is such an old cat, that he must know a great deal; don't you think so?'

'Yes; I suppose cats talk in their own language,' said Mrs. Dawson.

'Yes; I'm sure they do,' said Violet. 'So do birds. I should think Dick asks Tim a great many questions; I know I should if I were Dick. What a very old gentleman Tim must seem to Dick!—as old

as Uncle Brooks does to me, don't you think? I wonder whether he tells him about the mice he's caught, and what are his favourite things to eat, and what he thinks of his master and mistress.'

'Or perhaps he tells him cat fairy stories,' suggested Frank.

Old Mrs. Dawson muttered something about queer children, and asked them if they were ready for tea, and whether they'd run and tell Miss Popsy, who was going to have tea with them.

Popsy came, and brought Flossie, who was a little darling, Frank said; but Violet thought she wasn't to be compared to her Ned.

Mrs. Dawson poured out tea, and had some with them; for Mrs. Dawson's afternoon tea was quite an institution in the house, and Mrs. Brooks was accustomed to taking a cup with her sometimes; and Popsy had always had her tea with the old nurse till she was old enough to go to late dinner with her parents.

Violet insisted on nursing Dick all tea-time, and feeding him from her plate; and Frank did the same with Flossie.

'Heigh-ho!' said Uncle Brooks, coming in; 'cats and dogs at table! You don't allow that, do you, Mrs. Dawson?'

'It's only one cat and one dog, Uncle,' said Frank, who never could resist an argument.

'You see, they are so fond of the creatures,' said Mrs. Dawson, rising in her master's presence; 'and, bless their little hearts, it's hard to deny them anything when I've known their mother, and grandmother, and great-grandmother before them.'

'That's false logic, Mrs. Dawson, false logic.'

Mrs. Dawson didn't know what that meant, but she had a profound respect for her master's cleverness, so supposed it was all right.

'Yes, sir,' she said; 'and I couldn't go to deny them, poor dears.'

'Minerva, my dear,' said Mr. Brooks, 'you ought to know better than let your cousins bring the animals to table.'

'I don't suppose they'd do it at home, Papa; but when they are out, they must have a treat.'

'Yes; that is how children are spoilt. When I was young, no such foolish indulgences were allowed. In those days, cats were kept in the kitchen, and dogs out of doors, except the ladies' lap-dogs.'

'Oh, how horrid, Uncle!' said Violet. 'I wouldn't let my Ned be kept out of doors for anything. Won't you come and see my Ned, Uncle? He's such a darling; and I mustn't bring him, Auntie says, because he might gobble up Flossie. As if he would, you know! Why, he's so gentle and good, he does anything I tell him.'

'It is not good to place children in authority

over anything, even dumb creatures, at so early an age; it teaches them tyranny,' said Mr. Brooks pompously.

'What's that, Uncle?' said Violet.

'Tyranny is arbitrary power, Violet.'

'Oh, but I don't mean that; I want you to explain it like Mother does: she always makes me understand.'

'I know no other way of explaining it, unless I say it is a despotic rule.'

'Then I'll ask Mother,' said Violet; 'she'll know all about it. You must remember the word, Frank; it's too long for me,' and she gave Dick a hug and a kiss, and began walking up and down the room and tossing him about as if he were a baby. They had left the table just after Uncle Brooks came in, and were now ready for a game, and Violet positively had the audacity to ask her uncle to have a game with them.

'I think, my dear,' said Uncle Brooks, 'it is not consistent with the dignity of my years to be capering about a room; and after all the bread and jam and cake you children appear to have consumed, a little repose would be beneficial to you. I have a most ingenious puzzle I can lend you, which will probably amuse you, and from its mathematical construction give you instruction at the same time.'

The children did not understand half of what their

uncle said, but they quite understood there was a puzzle for them; so Violet dropped Dick, and clapping her hands, said, 'Oh, how jolly, Uncle!—a puzzle! a puzzle! Let me come and get it!'

She followed her uncle to the book-room, where he looked in the drawer of a cabinet for it. A pair of globes which ordinarily stood on the top of the cabinet were on the ground by Mr. Brooks' chair, as he had been using them that afternoon. Violet, in looking at them, found out they would turn, and was perfectly delighted.

'Oh, Uncle, look at these two big balls of yours!' she said; 'they turn just as you like. Let us have these to play with. I like this one best,' pointing to the terrestrial, 'because it's got most colour.'

'My dear,' said her uncle with dignity, 'I hope you will before long begin your study on the "Use of the Globes."'

'The use of them, Uncle! Why, what use are they except to play with?'

'You will learn some day.'

'You always say that, Uncle; but Mother always tells me what I ask.' This reminded her about the word she had to remember, so she muttered to herself 'timmeny, timmeny,' that she mightn't forget.

Uncle Brooks was opening one little drawer after another, but did not seem able to find the puzzle.

'What dear little drawers!' said Violet, watching

him; 'they'd just do for a doll's chest of drawers, wouldn't they? The two things here I'd like best, Uncle, are that chest of drawers and this lady,' pointing to Minerva, 'though I think I'd like the balls, now I know they turn.'

'But what would you do with Minerva? She wouldn't do for a plaything.'

'Oh! I want her, because it would be so lovely to paint her another colour, blue or pink, you know.'

Mr. Brooks looked horrified.

'Ted Wilberforce,' she went on, 'had a lady in his bedroom called Diana, and his mother let him bring it to our workshop, and we all painted it between us; it was such jolly fun. Oh! I would love to paint this one, she's ever so much bigger than Diana. We had an accident with Diana, and let her fall while we were painting; and a bit came off her nose, and a bit from that little nobby thing at the back of her head; but we stuck it on again with something, and Ted didn't mind it.'

'Children are brought up now-a-days without any reverence for art,' Mr. Brooks muttered to himself. 'Where can that puzzle be?' he said, and he walked across the room to where he usually sat, and began looking in his table drawer, which was crowded with papers and little boxes and odds and ends of all sorts.

'I think Diana is prettier than Minerva,' Violet went on, 'and I named my last doll Diana. Diana

Blackamoor, we called it, because Uncle Percy bought it for me from a nigger man on the sands, when we were at the seaside. It's such a funny'—

Before Violet could finish her sentence, Uncle Brooks turned round abruptly and said, 'Uncle Percy at Broadstairs?'

'Yes,' said Violet; 'and it was so jolly, we had such lots of fun!'

'How long was he there?'

'Oh, ever so long; I don't know how much. We used to have such nice donkey rides and all sorts of fun; and Ted Wilberforce came, and we were such a large party; and Mother said it was just right, you know, because there were four ladies and four gentlemen. There was me and Ted,—you know, I'm very fond of Ted,—and Uncle Percy and Cousin Popsy, and Ernie and Amy, and Frank and Mother. Wasn't it nice?'

'Go and tell your aunt to come to me, child,' said Mr. Brooks in a very severe tone of voice.

Violet was quite startled.

'Where's the puzzle, Uncle?'

'Never mind that; I can't find it. I want your aunt.'

Violet came away in a very discontented frame of mind. She ran back to Mrs. Dawson's room and said to Frank:

'Oh! isn't it a pity? Uncle can't find the puzzle,

and he's turned so cross just as I was telling him all about the jolly time at the seaside.'

'What?' said Popsy.

'Why, I was telling him, you know, about the donkey ride, and the fun we had, and the—the'—

'Yes!' said Popsy eagerly; 'what else?'

Popsy's face so frightened Violet that she thought she must have done something wrong, and then there came across her some dim idea that perhaps they had never told Uncle Brooks after all that Uncle Percy did go to Broadstairs. She quite remembered that Uncle Brooks didn't wish him to go there; but as he had gone, she thought, of course, he knew all about it.

When she saw Cousin Popsy looking so anxious, she began to understand what it all meant, and why her uncle had suddenly turned so cross; and instead of going on with her sentence, she said:

'But, oh! Uncle said I was to send Aunt to him directly.'

Popsy knew what this meant, and prepared for the worst. She was really a very good, dutiful girl, but she felt that she should never be able to bear the severity she was likely to meet from her father when he knew all about it. She longed to go and talk to Mrs. Orington on the subject, for she felt that would be some consolation; and so she proposed that the children should put on their things,

and she would walk back with them to Lambton Hall.

What passed between Mr. and Mrs. Brooks in the book-room no one knew, but it ended in Popsy being forbidden to go to Lambton Hall. Mrs. Orington did not think her Uncle Brooks had acted fairly in depriving her of Popsy's society, and blaming her as the cause of all the trouble, without allowing her to say a word in defence; so she told the little ones they had better not go to see their uncle for the present, as the sight of them would only make him angry. Therefore poor Popsy was more unhappy than ever, and every one concerned was very uncomfortable. Auntie Brooks used often to come over to Lambton Hall and deplore the miserable state of things between the two families.

Percy and Popsy were both told that if they would only give up loving each other, everything would be right again; but they did not seem to be able to manage it.

Popsy sometimes met her cousins walking from school, so she did not altogether lose sight of them.

Both Violet and Frank were very much puzzled with the state of affairs.

'Why mayn't Popsy come?' said Frank one day when she had met them, and walked to the gates of Lambton Hall, and then turned back.

'Because,' said Violet, 'she loves Uncle Percy;

and Uncle Brooks says she mustn't love Uncle Percy, and he has given her a punishment because she will.'

'Oh!' said Frank, who wanted to have the matter quite clear, 'if Mother said I wasn't to love you and I did love you, then it would be wrong?'

'Yes,' said Violet; 'but Mudge wouldn't be such a stupid, would she?'

'Of course not,' said Frank; 'she always tells us to love one another.'

'Yes; and I'm sure I love Uncle Percy, don't you?'

'Oh, don't I? He's just the one for a game. But why did you tell about him to Uncle Brooks, because Auntie said it was all through you?'

'Why, Frankie, don't you know, I was telling him about Diana Blackamoor, that Uncle Percy bought of the nigger-man'—

'Negro, Violet, you ought to say.'

'Oh, bother! Well, I was telling him, you know, and then he turned cross.'

'Well, then, I think we ought to punish that doll,' said Frank.

'So do I. Let's chop off her head and bury her.'

'Yes, do; and she shan't have a proper burial, shall she?'

'No; I'll tell you what we'll do, Frank. We won't

chop off her head; we'll drown her in the big water butt—that very big one, you know!'

'Oh yes, Violet, that will be delightful!'

So Diana Blackamoor was drowned, and was, as it were, regarded as a sacrifice which perhaps was expected in some way to propitiate Uncle Brooks.

When Granny heard of the proceedings, she did not think it at all delightful, but told the children they were very naughty indeed to spoil the rain water by throwing their doll in, and that it would be a great deal of trouble to get it out again, and that she thought them ungrateful children to throw away the pretty doll that Uncle Percy gave them.

'But, Granny,' argued Frank, 'Uncle Brooks is punishing Popsy, and it was all Diana's fault; and we thought Diana deserved to be punished more than Cousin Popsy.'

'You're nasty ungrateful children,' repeated Mrs. Leslie, not noticing Frank's argument.

'I think it's Uncle Brooks that is ungrateful,' said Violet.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIOLET'S BIRTHDAY.

THE month of October was one to which Violet always looked forward, for in it occurred her birthday, a day which was kept at Lambton Hall. The children had a whole holiday, and Mrs. Orington made a point of taking them to London and showing them some of its sights; and occasionally they had been to some morning performance at one of the theatres, or to Madame Tussaud's. But Violet didn't care much for the wax figures, and when Granny asked her on her return how she liked it, she said:

'Not very much, Granny; it's full of kings and queens and things, but they don't do anything, you know.'

So this birthday it had been arranged that they should go to the Polytechnic, and Uncle Percy had promised to meet them, and afterwards they were to have some dinner with him before they left London, and Frank and Violet were both looking forward to

the day with much eagerness. The sun was shining gloriously when Violet awoke and sat up, saying:

'It's my birthday; it's been such a long time coming. And now I wonder if I shall have some nice presents; but I shan't know till breakfast-time, so I'll try and be patient.'

'That's right, Leta darling,' said Mrs. Orington. 'Why, my little woman's getting quite old—seven to-day, just fancy!'

'Yes; but I'm not so old as I shall be presently, Mudge dear. When I'm fourteen, I shall be ever so old, shan't I, now?' said Violet.

'Well, yes; you'll be just twice the age you are at present, Leta. But suppose you get up now and have a trot before breakfast.'

'Oh yes, that'll be nice this bright morning,' and Violet was soon down-stairs, calling for Frank to go out with her.

They went round the garden and then into the avenue.

'How the leaves have fallen, Leta, haven't they? See how deep they are,' said Frank, kicking them up as he walked.

'It feels like the sands at Broadstairs,' said Violet.

'And don't you remember how we used to watch the people bathing, Leta?' said Frank.

'Oh, Frankie,' cried out Violet as a brilliant idea struck her, 'let's pretend it's the sea!' and shortly

after, while Mrs. Leslie was superintending the making of tea and coffee, she looked from the window and exclaimed:

'Why, Annie, what *are* those children doing? Just look at them.'

Mrs. Orington looked, and then walked out into the garden with Amy, and there in the avenue they came upon Frank and Violet without shoes and stockings, holding hands and bobbing up and down. Frank's jacket and waistcoat hung upon one of the trees, and little Violet's frock was tucked up around her.

'What in the world are you two chicks playing at?' asked Mrs. Orington.

'Oh, we're bathing at Broadstairs, Mudge dear,' they both said; 'and the sea's so nice and warm.'

'Well, suppose you dress and come to breakfast. Don't you want to see your presents, Leta?'

'Oh, that I do, Mudge,' she answered.

'Such a pile, Violet!' said Amy, who had been helping to arrange them.

When they reached the dining-room, Violet saw a little pile of parcels in front of her plate on the breakfast table. It was the custom at Lambton Hall to put all birthday presents on the breakfast table, and to give all the good wishes at that meal.

'Oh! who gave me this dear little vase full of violets? How sweet they are! And the vase *is*

pretty, with a dear doggie for a handle. Why, it's Ned, only this doggie's got a beautiful long tail, which Ned hasn't,' said Violet.

'That's my present, Leta dear, and I wish you hundreds of birthdays,' said Frank.

'Oh, thank you, Frankie; I *shall* be an old lady then, just like Miss Angelina at Cedar Cottage,' said Violet as she began to unpack her parcels.

'What a lovely little work-box! That's from dear Granny. Oh, I shall like to sew now! And what's this, I wonder? A book from Cousin Popsy, and it's called *Tales from Cat Land.* Why, those must be what Tim tells Dick when they sit together on the wall. That will be fun; you must read them to me, Frankie. And here's a big box. Whatever can it be, I wonder?' and after much cutting of string and unfolding of paper, Violet was able to open the box, and oh! what a sight met her eyes!

'A lovely, lovely pink and white dinner service, with Mudge's love! Oh, you dear darling Mudge, what fun we can have! And I shall give such dinner-parties, you know; it's beautiful,' and Violet clapped her hands with delight.

'Now, there's one more parcel, Leta,' said Frank; 'do open it. I know it's from Auntie.'

It was labelled,'For the use of "*Minerva Brooks.*"' It will be remembered that Violet had so named the doll Uncle Brooks had given her at Christmas.

The box was divided into little compartments, with shoes, and gloves, and handkerchiefs, combs and brushes, and a great many little articles necessary to a fashionable young lady like Minerva.

Violet was delighted, and looked from one to the other of her presents with much satisfaction.

'Oh! and here's a letter from Ernest, and he says he hopes I shan't spoil any of my presents before he comes home and sees them,' said Violet.

When breakfast was over, Mrs. Orington told Violet to follow her, and led the way to the children's own garden; and there on the grass stood a little carriage with two goats harnessed to it.

'Oh, Mudge!' was all Violet could say as she bounded up to the goats, and as she looked round the carriage Frank suddenly said, 'Look here, Leta,' and he held up a little card that was tied round one of the goat's necks: 'For little Violet, with her Uncle Percy's love,' was written on it.

'What a dear, good Uncle Percy! Now I've really a carriage of my own,' and she got in, and Frank led the goats round the grass.

'It is splendid!' said Violet, getting out again to have another look at it.

It was painted chocolate outside and pale blue in, and the cushions were of a darker shade of blue velvet, and the reins and harness were of light brown leather, and V. O. was painted in blue and silver on

each side of the little carriage; so it can be imagined how charming a little turn-out it was.

'Now, chicks, there's time to have just one or two rides, and then you must get ready to go to London,' said Mrs. Orington.

While they were being dressed, Amy came to Violet and said:

'Leta dear, I didn't put my present on the table—it's such a little thing, you know; but I hope you'll like it all the same, and I do wish you lots of happy birthdays,' and she gave her a little parcel.

'Oh, you kind Amy; it's that little china teapot I've looked at so often in Onslow, and wanted so much!' and Violet put her arms round Amy's neck and kissed her.

'Why, what's this?' said Mrs. Orington, coming in.

'Mudge dear, it's that little teapot I've wanted so often; and Amy's been and bought it for me, and wouldn't put it on the table with the other things because she thought it wasn't nice enough,' said Violet.

'That's very kind and thoughtful of you, Amy dear; but you should have put it with the others, for it isn't the value of the present, but the kindness that prompted you to give it that one thinks the most of, you know.'

Violet ran to show Granny her little teapot.

'Isn't it pretty, and wasn't it kind of Amy?' she said.

'Yes, love, very kind of her,' said Mrs. Leslie, looking at it.

'And it's real china too, Granny.'

'Well, dear, I can't say it's china at all; but it's some sort of crockery,' said Mrs. Leslie.

'It's real crockery, anyhow,' said Violet to herself as she walked out of the room with her little teapot.

'Now, chicks, we've only just time to catch the train,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Now, to-day you really do look like gentlemen's children. I wonder why you can't always look nice?' said Mrs. Leslie.

'Ah, but we're going out with dear Mudge, and that makes all the difference,' said Violet, giving a tug at her pretty little tuscan hat with its wreath of oats, to settle it more comfortably.

'Now don't drag at your hat like that, Violet,' said Mrs. Leslie, following them to the door.

Mrs. Orington, Violet, and Frank were soon seated in the train, being whirled away to town, and Mrs. Leslie and Amy sat under the trees with work and books. Amy was now quite a favourite with Mrs. Leslie, and enjoyed being with her.

Presently Mrs. Leslie said, 'You were very quiet all breakfast-time, dear; did you envy little Violet her presents?'

Amy coloured and looked down, saying, 'I'm afraid I did a little, you know, because I've never had any one to notice my birthdays; and I thought how nice it was to be remembered like Violet.'

'Poor child!' Mrs. Leslie murmured to herself,

The Houses of Parliament.

and then added aloud, 'You won't find you are forgotten here, dear, on your birthdays.'

When Mrs. Orington and her two chicks reached Waterloo, they jumped into a hansom, one sitting on each side of their mother. They drove over Westminster Bridge, and passed the Houses of Parliament just as Big Ben struck twelve o'clock.

'There's Ben striking the hour,' said Frank.

'Just as we're on the bridge, too,' said Violet.

'Why, that sounds like the song Cousin Popsy sings, doesn't it, Mudge?' said Frank. 'That one about standing on a bridge, you know.'

'Oh, you mean, "I stood on the bridge at midnight as the clocks were striking the hour," I suppose,' said Mrs. Orington, laughing.

'Yes,' said Frank; 'only we're going over in a cab.'

'And it isn't midnight,' said Violet.

'So that altogether, what we're doing and what the song says are very different, eh, Frank?'

'Well, yes; I suppose it isn't quite the same, Mudge,' he answered.

They soon reached the Polytechnic, and there on the steps stood Uncle Percy.

'There he is! there he is!' shouted the children as he came towards them and helped them out of the cab.

'Well, little one, many happy returns of your birthday,' said Uncle Percy to Violet.

'Oh, you dear kind Uncle Percy, to send me such a beautiful present! I didn't know anything about it till after breakfast; and I thought you'd forgotten me perhaps this birthday, or perhaps you'd give me your present up here, in London. It is such a lovely carriage, and such a pretty colour; and oh! the dear

little goats, they're so white, and I do love white things, Uncle, so much.'

'What a funny place!' said Frank. 'What's that great place of water in the middle, Uncle?'

'Oh, you'll see presently; there'll be some experiments with those little ships you see there,' said Uncle Percy.

'What are *speriments?*' asked Frank.

When this had been explained to his satisfaction, the next thing that struck the little ones was the diving-bell.

'What's it for?' asked Violet as she peeped under. 'Why, there's a seat all round the inside.'

'And little windows in the top,' said Frank.

'It's let down into the water, you know, chicks; and you can sit inside and not get wet,' said Mrs. Orington.

'But there's no floor, so the water must get in,' said Violet.

'Well, shall we all go down in it presently?' said Uncle Percy.

Frank was quite willing; but Violet said she was sure they would all get wet, and that would be so 'mizzable.'

The children required much explanation about the bell; and when they were at length satisfied, they decided that they 'didn't much care about it.'

Then they saw some dissolving views of London.

Many of the places they recognised, and one view of St. Paul's Cathedral particularly pleased Violet.

'There, Frank,' she said, 'I've been there with Auntie Brooks; but you haven't seen St. Paul's *Thedral* yet, you know.'

'Ah! but I see it now,' said Frank.

St. Paul's Cathedral

'I've seen it itself, though; and that's much better,' said Violet.

The next thing was a lecture on chemistry, which they didn't much care about; only Frank said, 'The *sperimcnts* were good, Uncle, weren't they?'

'And there were plenty of good bangs,' said Violet.

The glass-blowing pleased them very much indeed, and Uncle Percy bought Violet a skein of spun glass to hem a pocket-handkerchief for him, which, however, he has never had.

The best thing should always be kept till last, at least most people think so, and in the various entertainments at the Polytechnic this had certainly been done; at any rate so said Frank and Violet. It was given in what they call the 'large theatre,' and consisted of a series of scenes introducing 'Professor Pepper's ghost effect.'

It was called the 'Midshipman, the Mermaid, and the Monster of the Mediterranean.'

'Dear me,' said Violet, 'what a number of names for one thing!'

'And they all begin with M, too,' said Frank as he settled himself in his seat. 'What a long time the people are coming in; I wish they'd begin.'

When everybody had found places, the gas was turned low, and the band struck up, 'Far o'er the deep blue sea.'

'How dark it is, Mudge!' said Violet. 'I hope they won't let the "Monster of the *Terranium*" get loose.'

'Oh, they're sure to keep him chained up,' said Frank.

'Like they do the bears in the *Logical* Gardens, I suppose,' said Violet. 'I do like the Logical.'

Just then the curtain rose and disclosed a dissolving view of a ship leaving the shores of England, and some one on the stage explained that the midshipman was on board on his way to Malta.

'Isn't that pretty, Frank?' said Violet.

'And what a fine ship it is!' said Frank.

The view faded and gave place to another, in which the ship was being tossed about in a gale, and the lecturer said that the midshipman was washed overboard.

Then the curtain on which the dissolving views had been shown slowly rolled up, and the stage behind was made to represent the bottom of the sea.

'How lovely! Look at the coral and shells!' cried Violet.

'And seaweed like we used to get at Broadstairs,' said Frank.

'Oh, goodness me, there's a man sinking down through the water! He'll be drowned, I know he will!' cried out Violet, springing to her feet. 'Look, Mudge; he's fallen down on those rocks!'

'Hush, Leta dear, not so loud,' said Mrs. Orington; 'it isn't real water, you know, so the man's quite safe.'

This of course was the midshipman sinking, and

presently some queer-looking fish appeared to swim towards him and investigate him. Violet and Frank were deeply interested, and it was quite impossible to keep them quietly in their seats.

'How can he walk about like that under the water, Mudge? Why, he isn't drowned after all,' said Violet.

'He doesn't seem to like those big fish so near him, does he?' said Frank.

'I don't think you'd like them either, Frank, would you?' asked Uncle Percy.

'I'm sure I shouldn't; I should run away,' said Frank.

From a cave at the back of the stage there now appeared a brilliant vision of a mermaid with a looking-glass in her hand. This was managed with the Pepper's Ghost arrangement, and the figure appeared to swim forward towards the midshipman, who of course was enchanted by the beautiful creature.

'Oh, isn't she lovely,' said Frank, 'with that golden hair?'

'And look at the wreath of pink coral, Frank, and what a pretty looking-glass! I should like that,' said Violet.

Just then the lecturer explained that the mermaid had a guardian who never allowed her to speak to any one, that she was dreadfully afraid of him, and if any one happened to sink, she always tried to warn

them, and told them of caves to hide in to escape this dreadful creature.

Then a most horrible thing came crawling in among the rocks, and the mermaid vanished.

'Goodness me! how dreadful!' cried Violet. 'This must be the monster of the Terranium, Frank.'

'Isn't he horrid?' said Frank.

'Doesn't the poor midshipman look terrified?'

'And well he may, Leta, I think,' said Mrs. Orington.

'Yes, indeed, Mudge dear. I'm so glad I'm close to you,' said Violet.

There were several more scenes, in which the mermaid and the midshipman met, and she told him of a way to escape and reach a rock above the sea, where a ship could take him off. But he wanted to rescue the beautiful mermaid from the monster, and though she begged him not to try, because he would be sure to be killed, still he insisted.

The last scene was the cave of the monster, and the midshipman stealing in with a knife to try and kill him while he was asleep, and the mermaid watching from the distance.

'How pale she is! and doesn't she tremble?' said Violet. 'Oh, I do hope the monster will be killed.'

'I don't believe he will,' said Frank.

'Oh, look, he's coming!' said Violet. 'The mid-

shipman woke him up, and hasn't killed him—oh dear! oh dear!'

There was a dreadful struggle, and at last, when the monster had swallowed the midshipman's knife and cap and boots, the poor fellow tried to climb a great rock of coral; but the monster was after him in a second.

'He'll catch him!' cried Frank. 'See how close he's getting.'

'And after eating up his boots and cap, he might have been satisfied,' said Violet.

'There; I told you so!' screamed Frank.

'Horrid beast!' shrieked Violet as the monster swallowed up the poor midshipman; and as the curtain slowly descended, the mermaid was seen shrinking behind a rock, with her face buried in her hands, and the looking-glass shattered at her feet.

'Oh, Mudge dear, do they have a fresh man every day for that monster to eat up?' said Violet.

'No, Leta dear, of course not,' said Mrs. Orington.

'But he is eaten up, Mudge dear, isn't he? or is it only make-believe, like our games?' Violet asked.

'That's all, chick. You didn't really think that monster was alive, did you?'

'Well, no, Mudge; not quite alive, you know. Only he seemed very real, now, didn't he?' said Violet.

'It's very clever, I think,' said Frank; 'don't you, Uncle?'

'Yes, my boy; I think it's very well managed indeed. And now, who's ready for some dinner?' said Percy Leslie.

'Oh, I'm so hungry,' said Violet.

'So am I,' said Frank.

They then had a comfortable little dinner at Percy Leslie's chambers; and he afterwards went with them to Waterloo, and put them into the Lambton train.

'I'm so tired,' said Violet with a little sigh, sinking back among the cushions; 'and I've had such a happy birthday, dear Uncle Percy; and to-morrow I must go out in my carriage, and look at all my presents ever so much.'

'Good-bye, good-bye,' they called out as the train moved off.

They were soon at Lambton Hall, in bed, and sound asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

BY TRAIN TO AMERICA.

CHRISTMAS had come again, and Ernest had just arrived for his holidays, bright and merry and rosy-cheeked as ever.

Since Violet's seventh birthday until now, nothing of any importance had occurred; the children had gone to school day after day, had played their usual games, had their little quarrels and made them up again.

Amy had become more and more a favourite with everybody at Lambton Hall, and even Mrs. Leslie had no cause to regret the addition to the family circle; for Amy helped her in many a little household duty, and very cleverly she managed anything that was entrusted to her.

It was the morning after Ernest's arrival; and Violet had been showing him all her birthday presents, and he had said, 'Well, really, Leta dear, I think you're a very lucky little girl; but what I most want to see is your carriage and pair, you know.'

'Oh, you must wait a little time, Ernie, for I don't want you to see it without the pair, you know; and Sexton always attends to my horses, and can't come to-day till about twelve o'clock, and then he'll harness them to the carriage,' said Violet.

'Oh, very well; then look here. Let's all have a game at trains; and then you shall be travelling to America station by the train that's due at twelve o'clock, and the carriage shall be there to meet you,' said Ernest.

'Oh, that's splendid!' said Violet. 'Come along, Frank and Amy.'

'You must really wait a moment, Leta dear,' said Frank. 'You know I always get *interjection* if I run about directly I've finished breakfast.'

This was a favourite saying of Frank's, because, one day having complained to Mrs. Orington of a pain in the chest after running fast to school after a hearty dinner, she had answered that he most likely had indigestion from running so soon after a meal.

The little ones were soon engrossed in trains.

'Well, really, my good woman,' said Ernest to an imaginary person, 'if you're so late at the station that you can't look after your luggage, you can't blame me if it's lost. 'What do you say? Came from Europe by the 8.15 train, eh? Well, then, you had to change at Asia, and I've no doubt you lost your boxes there. Perhaps you'll find them at America.

Right there in front? Now put your head in, or you'll have it knocked off at the first railway arch, my good woman, and I can't look after it; and then when we reach America, you'll be asking me for your head, I suppose,' and Ernest banged an imaginary door, blew his whistle, and started off with a great deal of puff—puff.

It must be explained that Ernest bowled his hoop round the garden for the train, and Frank and Violet were sometimes passengers, and sometimes acted as porters at the various stations.

'Now then, hurry on, hurry on!' shouted Frank. 'Here's the train from Africa coming in,' and he rang a little bell and waved the green flag to show that the line was clear.

'America!—America!—America!' Ernest called out, pretending to jump out of his van.

'Now, where's that old person who lost her boxes? Oh, there you are, mum. Well, how many are there? Suppose you come and look in my van. Now be quick! Bless me, what a time you take to get out! I shall be late at Europe, and the next train will run into us.'

'Is this the right train for Europe, please, Guard? asked Violet.

'Yes; quite right. What class, madame?' said Ernest.

'First, of course, man,' said Violet grandly.

'Oh, dear me, marm, I shouldn't have thought it, with that old shawl and bonnet!' said Frank.

'What *intertinence!*' said Violet, tossing her head. 'Now, just look after my luggage, or I'll kill you.'

'Well, really, Leta, I don't think a lady would say that,' said Frank.

And thus the little ones played for some time, and at twelve o'clock Sexton, according to instructions, took Violet's carriage to America station.

As soon as Ernest saw it, he dropped hoop and whistle, and rushed off, shouting:

'Oh, my! Leta, what a beauty! what lovely white horses and real blue velvet cushions! It's splendid!'

'You oughtn't to have come right across from Asia like that, though,' said Frank, coming up; 'there were ever so many people waiting at Africa, you know, and they're all so cross.'

'Well, they must wait till to-morrow,' said Ernest; 'there won't be any more trains to-day.'

Ernest was quite a long time examining the carriage, and admired it all very much indeed.

'Oh, I do so want to drive and see Mrs. Sexton! Ernest, do ask Mudge if we may go. She's never seen my carriage yet, and I've been going ever so many times,' said Violet.

Mrs. Orington gave consent, and off they started, Frank driving the goats, who were quite used to him

by this time. Violet sat by his side, and Ernest in the seat behind.

Sexton's cottage was not very far off, and they soon reached it. It looked very neat and nice, and the little bit of garden in perfect order.

'Why, dearies, I couldn't think who it was a-driving up so grand like! Well, that is a beautiful cart, dear,' said Mrs. Sexton.

'It's my *carriage*, you know, that I told you about,' said Violet; 'and I've been coming so often to show it you; but you know, Mrs. Sexton, I'm always so busy.'

'Yes, to be sure, dearie; and here's Master Ernest too. How he do be growed, to be sure! Now you'll all come in, won't you? There's a nice cake I've made, and I should like you to see my rooms; they've been papered and all cleaned up like since you were here,' said Mrs. Sexton.

'But do look at the white horses,' said Ernest. 'Aren't they beauties, now? I've only seen them to-day, you know.'

Mrs. Sexton admired them and the carriage a great deal, and then the children followed her into the cottage, and she showed them how nice her rooms were—the bedroom with its clean dimity curtains and bed-hangings, and the walls decorated with many coloured prints and photographs; in fact, as Frank told Mrs. Orington when they reached

home, 'Really, Mudge dear, no one could desire more comfortable rooms.'

After staying half an hour chatting to Mrs. Sexton and tasting her cake, and having some milk, they got into the carriage again and drove home.

Christmas day came and passed, with the customary presents and pretty cards, but they all felt it was not so happy as usual. There were no pleasant visits to Rose Bank, no Popsy to come and join in their games. Uncle Percy was spending Christmas in Warwickshire, and Ted Wilberforce had not come to Castlemans, for his mother not being well, had to pass the winter in the south of France, and Ted spent his holidays with some relations in Scotland; so altogether a cloud hung over the happy household at Lambton.

To Amy, however, who could not but compare this to her previous experiences of Christmas, it was delightful, and she was saying so one afternoon to Ernest as they were turning over a scrap-book together, in which all their valentines, Christmas and birthday cards, were always put by Mrs. Orington.

'Oh, but it isn't half so jolly as usual, Amy. Uncle Percy used to come and stay, and Cousin Popsy came and had such games with us generally, and Auntie Brooks too; and now, there's all this nonsense, and nobody is to love anybody else, and we can't go to Rose Bank, and Popsy mustn't come

here, and Auntie Brooks looks so miserable when she comes, and she and Granny seem always wiping their eyes,' said Ernest.

'I call it stuff and nonsense to be so *mizzable*,' said Violet.

'And so do I,' said Frank.

'Well, things always do get better when they're very bad, you know,' said Amy, 'and I daresay they will now;' and in time so they did, but not till after Ernest had gone back to school, and the others had been doing their daily tasks for some time; in fact, the trees were green again, and the birds singing merrily, and the swallows had come back, ere that much longed-for time arrived.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER.

'OH, Cousin Popsy dear,' said Violet one day when she and Frank met her in Onslow, 'it is such a very, very long time since we have seen you! You never come this way now.'

'You forget, Leta, that it's you who don't come this way now; for you go to school in Lambton, and so I never see you; but I meet Frankie sometimes, don't I, Frank?'

'Yes; I often meet Popsy, and we go into Mrs. Morland's and have a bun, don't we, Cousin Popsy?'

'Oh! I'm so hungry!' said Violet, hearing her favourite old shop mentioned. 'I should so like a bun, and I think I've got a penny.' She dived into a pocket which seemed to hold a great many things, and at last found a halfpenny, but nothing more. 'Oh dear! I think I must have lost the other halfpenny.'

'Never mind, Leta, I'll pay for the bun,' said Popsy.

They went into Mrs. Morland's and had some nice new buns, and a chat with the old lady, who was very glad to see Miss Violet again, she said. The children had been accustomed to go into the shop for shelter from the rain.

'And how do you like your new school, Violet?' said Popsy.

'I don't like it so very much at present,' she answered; 'they're all such big girls, you know, quite grown up, some of them as big as you, Cousin Popsy. But Amy gets on very well, and Miss Cooper says she's very clever.'

'That's capital!' said Popsy.

'Mother and Amy are in the town at the draper's, buying a lot of things, and Mother said we might walk on, because we were getting so tired of the shop.'

'Oh, I am glad!' said Popsy; 'let's come on to meet them.'

They found them still in the shop making purchases; and Popsy was delighted to see her cousin, for they had not chanced to meet for some weeks.

'Dear me, Annie,' said Popsy after they had walked on together some little way, 'this is miserable work, never being allowed to come to see you or the little ones: I'm so lonely and wretched, and I feel it's making it so uncomfortable for you. Whatever can I do?'

'I don't see that you can do anything, Popsy; it's Uncle who is causing all the unhappiness. It seems to me he is the only person that can do anything to make things right.'

'But suppose I promise never to speak to Percy again; won't that make Papa all right with you?'

'I don't see how you can make such a promise, unless Percy goes out of the country; and much as we respect Uncle Brooks, I don't see that the family is called upon to make such a sacrifice as that just for his pleasure. If you are to have any intercourse with us, of course you cannot help seeing Percy, and it is ridiculous to suppose that when you meet him you are to run away and not speak to him. No; I don't see what is to be done, unless Uncle Brooks himself gives in.'

'Oh dear me!' said Popsy; 'it's all very unpleasant. I counted on being so happy when we came to live near you, and Mamma thought it would be nice for her to be near Aunt Leslie; and now there's nothing but misery, and all through me.'

Frank and Violet, who were walking with Amy in front, heard the best part of this conversation, and quite agreed that it was very miserable for things to go on in this way.

'I call it very *mizzable* indeed,' said Violet, 'for Popsy never gets any games with us, or swings, or

anything, and I know she only gets lessons at home. What's to be done, Frank?'

'Let's write to Uncle,' said Frank. He was just getting into small-hand, and his new excitement was writing letters.

'But I can't write,' said Violet in a whining tone. 'It's no good doing that if I can't write.'

'But you shall sign your name, Violet, and I'll guide your hand.'

'Shall I do the writing,' said Amy, 'and you tell me what to say?'

'Oh! I can write it,' said Frank grandly; 'and if I can't do the capitals, you shall do them for me, Amy.'

'But I want to do something to it,' said Violet; 'putting my name is nothing.'

'Then will you take it to Uncle, because he likes you best?'

'Yes; I'll take it,' said Violet.

Writing a letter was with Frank a great work of art, and not to be done in a hurry. He had had a nice little desk given to him by his mother on his last birthday, and on the first half-holiday this desk was got out, and he and Violet and Amy proceeded to compose a letter to Uncle Brooks.

'We must be very polite to him,' said Frank.

'Yes,' said Violet; 'what do you say to people when you have to be polite?'

'You ought to say "Sir," like Uncle says they did in his young days. Shall we say, "Dear Sir"?'

'Oh yes,' said Violet, 'that's beautiful: "Dear Sir;" what next?'

Frank got himself well in front of his desk, and twisted his head about a great deal before he could make up his mind where to begin. At last he said:

'Amy, do make a capital D, please; it's so hard.'

Amy made it.

Then after a great deal of painstaking, the word Dear' was accomplished.

'Be quick, Frank,' said Violet; 'we shall never get it done if you don't write quicker.'

'You must be patient, Violet. I am obliged to do it very nicely, and must take my time. There, now, I've finished "Sir."'

'Now say, Frank, we're all very *mizzable* and'—

'That won't do, Violet, because you've got to be very *expectful;* so you must say something else first, about hoping he's in good health.'

'Oh, bother!' said Violet; 'that will take up such a deal of time, and Uncle never is in very good health, you know; so what's the good of saying so?'

'Well, we must say something about take the opportunity; that's the way we write letters at school.'

'Oh yes; that's fine!' said Violet.

'How ought we to put it, Amy?' asked Frank.

'Would you like to say, "I now take the opportunity of writing to you,"?'

'Yes; that's beautiful!' said Frank. 'Say it over again, Amy; I've forgotten quite how it comes.'

'"I now take the"'—

'That's enough for the present.'

This was accomplished, and when it came to 'opportunity,' and Amy had spelt it several times, and Frank had put three p's and scratched one out and made rather a mess, he at last asked Amy to write that word. He then got on pretty well to the end of that sentence, with only one blot and a smudge.

'Don't you think,' said Amy, 'you had better wash your hands? There are a good many finger marks on the paper.'

Frank washed his hands, and then wanted to know what next.

'Now say we're all so *mizzable*, Frank, and ask him to forgive us, and tell him we drowned old Diana.'

'No,' said Frank; 'we mustn't begin that till the second page, and we haven't finished the first yet. Mustn't we say something about health, you know? That's what we do at school.'

Maria came into the play-room at this moment, and Frank went on:

'Maria, when you're writing to people, don't you

say you hope they're quite well? It's polite to say it, isn't it, Maria?'

'Yes; I always say, "I hope you're quite well, which it leaves me at present." That's what I say, and what my sister says when she writes to me.'

'Oh! tell me that again, very slow, you know, because I want to write it down.' This sentence took quite ten minutes to get through.

'There now!' he said when he had done it, and was holding it up the better to admire it; 'I think it's beautiful.'

'Lovely!' said Violet, looking at it. 'Isn't it splendid, Amy?'

'It's rather crooked,' said Amy.

'But it's very nice, Amy; and you won't say so because you think you could do it better.'

'No, really, Violet; don't be vexed. I think it's very nice, all but a few smudges and blots, and all going down hill.'

'That'll do, Maria,' said Violet. 'Our letter's a great secret, so you mustn't stay here to hear it.'

'If you want to know any more, Master Frank, you can call me, and I'll tell you what to say,' and Maria went out of the room.

'Now,' said Violet, 'we've been polite; so turn over leaf and let's begin the other part. What shall we say?'

'Say we want to make it up, shall we?'

'Yes, that's it; and we've drowned Diana. How shall we put it, Amy?'

'Say we shall be very glad to make it up, and we offered up Diana as a sacrifice.'

'That's beautiful, Amy! Oh! you *are* clever! Tell me over again very slow, while I write.' This was written down and admired, only Amy said she thought it ought to begin with a capital W, and that there should be a full stop at the end of the first page. So the small w was scratched out and the big one put in its place, and the attempt to make a full stop resulted in a large blot.

'Now, what next?' said Frank, getting very flushed with his exertions, and having quite as much ink spread over his face and fingers as on the paper.

'Say, "Please make us all happy, Uncle, and Uncle Percy, and Popsy too,"' suggested Violet.

'Yes,' said Frank; 'that's very nice. Ought there to be another capital, Amy?'

'No; I think a semicolon will do there,' said Amy.

'Please make it for me, Amy.'

By the time this sentence was written, the middle of the third page was reached; for although Frank called it small-hand, the writing certainly took up a great deal of room.

'I'm so tired,' said Frank. 'I hope there's not much more.'

'Read it all through, now,' said Violet, clapping her hands. 'Doesn't it look beautiful?'

Frank began:

'Dear Sir,—I now take the opportunity of writing to you. I hope you are quite well, which it leaves me at present. We shall be very glad to make it up, and we offered up Diana as a sacrifice; please make us all happy, Uncle, and Uncle Percy, and Popsy too.'

'That's lovely!' said Violet.

'Now, oughtn't we to say something about "yours truly,"' suggested Frank, 'and then put our names?'

'You mustn't say "yours truly" to your Uncle,' suggested Amy; 'you must say "affectionate nephew," I think.'

'But that isn't *expectful*,' said Frank. 'Let's ask Maria.'

Maria was at that moment coming in with the tea-tray.

'Now, please, Master Frank, you must clear up now, for it's tea-time.'

'Just stop a minute, Maria; we want you to tell us what you put at the end of your letter.'

'I always say, "With kind love from your affectionate sister;" but, of course, Master Frank, if that's the very particular letter you were writing just now, perhaps you want something more polite.'

'Yes, Maria; that's just what I do want.'

'Well, if I was writing to Mistress or any one, where I wanted to be very polite, I should send my duty, and say, "Yours very respectfully."'

'Yes; that's it,' said Frank. 'Shall I put, "We send our duty"?'

'Yes, Frankie; and don't forget the rest.'

The duty was sent, and then Frank begged Amy to finish, for he was quite worn out with his exertions, and the prospect of the word respectfully was too much for him. So Amy wrote, 'Yours very respectfully;' and then the signing of the letter was put off till a more convenient period, for Frank was peremptorily ordered by Maria to come and have his hands and face washed at once, or his Granny would be coming down to tea and finding him in that state. So the precious letter was put away in Frank's desk; and a very dirty-looking crumpled thing it was. But it was the first Frank had ever achieved all by himself; that is to say, the first real letter that was to go away, as he had often played at writing letters since he had had his desk.

'Why, how quiet you've all been this afternoon! said Granny when she appeared. 'I thought you would have been out such a fine afternoon as this.'

'We've had some very important business, Granny, that has kept us in,' said Violet.

'Dear me! what is it? Frank looks as if he'd

been stooping over something; his face is quite flushed.'

'We can't tell you now, Granny, because it's a secret, but we'll tell you soon; it's so jolly.' and Violet clapped her hands in anticipation of the triumph she expected to achieve by this wonderful letter.

'Well, you must all have a run in the garden after tea, for it isn't good for you to keep in-doors so much.'

So the signing of the letter was put off to another day.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DELIVERY OF THE LETTER.

AFTER the letter was signed, the next difficulty was how to deliver it. The children were never sent with messages to Rose Bank now, and in fact Mr. Brooks had never seen little Violet since the unlucky day that Diana Blackamoor caused so much trouble. He had met Frank in Onslow once, and had spoken kindly to him. Two or three half-holidays passed without there being any chance of the letter reaching Uncle Brooks, for Mrs. Orington or Granny went out with the children herself. But at last a day came when there was nothing particular to do, and the three children begged that they might go for a little walk. Granny asked them to go to a shop in the village and get her some tape and a bit of coarse linen that she wanted, and gave them a little bag to carry it in. When they came in for the bag and money, Granny said:

'Why, how smart you are, Violet! What have

you put on all those nice things for? Just to go out for a walk?'

'I told Maria I wanted to look nice to-day, Granny, because I have some very particular business.'

'Well, I just hope you won't spoil them, Violet; for you generally forget what you have on, and I'm sure sometimes you both come home like little sweeps. Now I shall be very angry if that frock is spoiled.'

'I'll look after her, Granny,' said Frank.

'You're quite as bad as she is, Frank; but Amy's always neat. She'll look after you; won't you, Amy?'

'Oh yes! I won't let her get dirty.'

When they got outside, Frank said, 'Now, Violet, put the letter in the bag, because we might lose it.' So the letter was put in, and they all started off.

It was a lovely day in May, and the laburnums and lilacs and hawthorns were all looking very lovely, and filling the air with their beautiful scent. Amy, who had never seen any of these trees in blossom before, was enchanted. She had already learnt a great deal about the flowers and trees, and was so observant that she was now almost as forward in this sort of knowledge as the children themselves.

As they walked along, Amy suddenly stopped

and said, 'Why, what bird's that? What a funny note it has, quite different from the rest!'

'That's the cuckoo,' said Frank. 'I've heard him before, this year, some time ago; he always comes in the spring.'

'What is he like? Is he big like the blackbird, or more like the sparrow?'

'Oh! he's a big bird, bigger than a blackbird; but you don't often see one. He doesn't build a nest like the others, but lays in another bird's nest, and makes the other bring up his young one.'

'How funny of him!' said Amy.

'I call it lazy of him,' said Violet, 'to go and lay in another bird's nest.'

'I wish I could see one,' said Amy.

'You may watch and watch for hours,' said Frank, 'like I've done, and you can hear them going about all round you singing "Cuckoo," and yet you can't see them. I can't think how they go about like that. But I have seen one.'

'And do these beautiful trees come out every year like this?'

'Yes; every year in May. We call that a May-tree,' pointing to a hawthorn that was covered with blossom.

'Oh dear, what a deal I've lost in those twelve years!' said Amy. 'How lucky you are, always to have seen such beautiful things ever since you can

remember, and to have had such a nice mother always!'

'Yes; there's no one like Mudge, is there, Violet?'

'I should think not,' said Violet; 'as if there could be!'

'And you've nothing miserable to remember in your lifetime, nothing to make you sad when you think, nothing horrible to dream about.'

'I'm sure we were very *mizzable*,' said Violet, suddenly thinking of the letter. 'It wasn't nice at all for Popsy never to come and play with us; and she's never been to have dinner out of my new service, or seen any of my beautiful presents except the little carriage; and Auntie Brooks is always crying about it, and Granny says Uncle Brooks is a cross old thing, and we're all very unhappy; and if Uncle Brooks doesn't make it up after he's read the letter, I'll never speak to him again, no, never!'

'You must be very polite when you go in, Violet,' said Frank. 'Don't say anything to vex him, and don't *conkerdict* him, you know, because Uncle hates to be *conkerdicted*. You must agree with everything he says.'

'I won't, if he doesn't make it up,' said Violet with a very determined air.

As the children neared Rose Bank, they began to get a little nervous. They were undertaking a mission that to them seemed of the very greatest

importance. They had kept it secret from every one, though they little thought that Granny and their mother had had a hearty laugh over the letter, which Granny had found in Frank's desk.

'Suppose he's out?' said Amy.

'Oh, Uncle's never out!' said Violet; 'he's always reading his books.'

'But perhaps he's very busy,' said Frank, 'and mustn't be disturbed.'

'But this is such important business that I *must* see him; and I shan't ask any one, but go into his room.'

'Perhaps he'll be having a nap,' said Frank. 'He does sometimes fall asleep over his books, you know.'

'Then I must wake him, and tell him it's very important.'

'I wonder whether we shall have to wait long,' said Frank; 'because I think Amy and I had better go on for a walk, and come back again to see if you're ready.'

'No; you mustn't do that, Frank, in case you're wanted. You must stand outside and wait.'

'I wish we'd brought Ned,' said Frank, 'because then we might have had some fun with him while we waited.'

'But then, if you're wanted, you would have had to leave him outside, because Auntie doesn't like dogs in the house.'

'Now, here we are, Violet! You go in, and we'll wait out here, and I'll tell Amy a story; shall I, Amy?'

'No; tell me about the birds, Frank.'

Violet went in at the gate and up to the door, and rang the bell. Her little heart beat rather fast, for she began to feel the responsibility of the task she had undertaken. It was many months since she had stood at that door, and the strange sensation of being there added to her fear. The servant looked quite astonished when he saw her, and said, 'Oh, Miss Violet, is it you?'

'Yes,' said Violet; 'I'll go up to Mrs. Dawson.'

But just as she had gone up a few stairs, with little Flossie clambering up after her and barking, Mrs. Dawson appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

'Goodness gracious me! Why, it's Miss Violet!' she said, lifting up her hands. 'Well, I *am* glad to see you; and how tall you have grown!'

'And I'm *so* glad to see you, Mrs. Dawson,' she said. 'It's so *mizzable* never to come and see any of you, and never to have Popsy to play with us, and we're all so tired of being mizzable.'

'Bless your heart, dear, and so are we! I am sure the house isn't the same place. To think I've served them all so many years, and known your great-grandmother before you, for it to come to this. I declare, Miss Violet, I've shed many a tear over it; I

Violet and Mrs. Dawson.

have, indeed. But come along to Auntie; she's in the drawing-room, and glad enough she'll be to see you.'

'No,' said Violet in a low tone; 'I'm going straight to Uncle. I've got a letter for him, and I must see him.'

'But he mustn't be disturbed, Miss Violet. You had better see Auntie first, and ask her whether you may see him.'

'No; I must go in,' said Violet in a determined way; 'and you are not to tell Auntie I am here. Now, mind that; it's a great secret, and I haven't told Mother. I've left Frank outside,' and she came down-stairs and walked straight to Mr. Brooks' room.

'Well, I never!' said Mrs. Dawson to herself. 'I wonder what she's going to do now. They are the very strangest children I ever knew.'

Violet knocked at the book-room door, and then entered.

'Dear me!' said the old gentleman, laying down his compasses, with which he was making measurements on a piece of paper; 'so you've come to see your old uncle at last! Why, what a big girl you've grown!'

'Yes, Uncle; I'm so glad to see you again—so very glad, because it isn't a bit nice never to see you.'

'Isn't it, little one?' he said, taking her up and

kissing her. 'Do you mean to say you really like to see your old uncle?'

'Yes, I do, very much, and we all do; and we've all been very *miszable;* and Popsy never comes, and Uncle Percy never comes, and Auntie cries when she comes, and nobody's allowed to love anybody else, and we don't like it at all, and we want you to make it up.'

Violet had said all this so fast that she was quite out of breath. Mr. Brooks was very fond of his family, though he had an odd way of showing it, and he had been very uncomfortable for some time past about the state of affairs. His wife and daughter always appeared to be cheerful in his presence, but he guessed they were not happy, and Mrs. Dawson made no pretence of being happy. He missed seeing the children occasionally, and missed hearing little bits of chit-chat of Lambton Hall and all its inmates from Popsy and Mrs. Brooks. They always managed now to find other subjects of conversation. These little things, although they might seem trifles to such a clever man as Mr. Brooks, really affected him very much. He said to himself that Mrs. Orington had punished him by keeping the children away, and his wife and daughter had punished him by their silence on family matters.

'You want me to make it up, Violet, eh?'

'Yes, Uncle, very much; and we've written you a letter, and here it is,' producing it from her bag; 'and we expect you to make it up when you've read it.'

Mr. Brooks looked very much amused as he took the soiled and crumpled note, and still more amused when he read it.

'Oh!' he said, smiling, 'this production is yours and Frank's?'

'Yes, Uncle, we did it; and we just asked Maria to help us a little, and Amy did a little, and I did some, and Frank did the writing.'

'Well, he didn't spare the ink, at any rate. And so you offered up Diana as a sacrifice? Why, you're regular little pagans.'

'I don't know what that means. Amy put that in. But we drowned Diana, you know, in the water-butt, because it was all through her; but Granny was very angry, because it spoilt the water.'

'But what had Diana to do with it?'

'Why, don't you know, Uncle? I told you about Diana Blackamoor that Uncle Percy gave me; and while I was telling you, you got very angry, and sent me away, and I've never been to see you since; and Popsy's never been allowed to come to Lambton.'

'Oh, was that it? Well, and now we are to make it up, eh?'

'Yes; you must make it up, and love us all again, and let everybody love everybody else, and not make Auntie cry any more, and let Popsy come and make-believe have dinner out of my new service, and all be so jolly; won't you?'

'And what will you give me if I do?'

'I'll give you a hundred thousand million kisses.'

'Then give me one of the hundred thousand million now, and we'll make it up, and put off the rest to another day; shall we?' he said, kissing her.

'And now it's all made up, is it?' said Violet.

'Yes, quite.'

'And Cousin Popsy may come, and Uncle Percy too?'

'Yes; I suppose I must let things take their own course.'

'And may we all have tea with Mrs. Dawson next half-holiday?'

'Yes; you had better talk to Auntie about that.'

'Oh, I'm so glad!' said Violet, clapping her hands; 'and now I must go and speak to my favourite old lady' (meaning the bust of Minerva). 'I haven't seen her for such an age, and I'm so glad to see her again. And there are the globes; and we've got two at my new school, Uncle, bigger than that. And here's the dear little chest of drawers! Oh! it's so nice to see everything again!'

'Is it?' said her uncle, quite pleased that she should take so much interest in his room.

'It's delightful! I do love everything here. Now, may I bring Frank and Amy? They're outside.'

'Outside the door, do you mean?'

'No; in the road. They didn't dare to come till they knew if you'd made it up.'

'Poor children! Run along and fetch them in, and let us find Auntie.'

But Violet had not far to go, for Mrs. Dawson had no notion of the 'poor little dears standing outside their own aunt's house,' and had brought them in and given them something good to eat in her room; and Violet found them thoroughly enjoying themselves with Popsy and Auntie, Mrs. Dawson looking on and wiping her eyes, for she was crying with joy at seeing Violet and Frank again.

'Oh! Auntie! Popsy!' said Violet, kissing them; 'it's all right, and Uncle's made it up; and you're to come, and Uncle Percy too; and nobody's to cry any more about it, and everybody is to be allowed to love everybody else; isn't it jolly?' and she clapped her hands in her usual fashion.

'Are you quite sure?' said Popsy, hugging her.

'Yes, certain sure. Go and ask Uncle.'

'Why, how did you manage it all, you little monkey?' said Auntie Brooks.

'We wrote a most beautiful letter, Auntie, Frank

and me; and Amy helped, and put in the long words and capitals; and Uncle was so pleased with it that he's made it up.'

'It seems almost too good to be true,' said Popsy, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. 'Are you quite sure about it, Leta?'

'Oh yes, so sure, Popsy! Uncle's kissed me ever so many times; and I went all round his room, and made it up with Minerva, and the globes, and the chest of drawers, and everything; and then he sent me to find Auntie and Frank, and he says we may all come to tea next Saturday, if you will let us, Auntie.'

'I'm sure I shall only be too glad; and so will you, Nurse, won't you?'

'Yes, indeed, ma'am,' said the old lady, wiping her eyes; 'I do thank God most sincerely that it's all right again. To think I should have known their great-grandmother before them, and never any quarrels in the family, and for it to come to this. It was enough to break a poor old woman's heart, it was.'

'But now you'll cheer up, won't you, Mrs. Dawson?' said Violet; 'and we're going to have tea with you on Saturday, ain't we, Auntie? and then we shall all be so happy.'

'I'll go and see if Papa wants us in his room, or whether he's coming here,' said Mrs. Brooks, and

presently she returned with her husband, and Popsy ran up to him, and he kissed her, and 'everybody kissed everybody,' as Violet afterwards described it to her mother.

Then the children returned home; and they not only forgot to go to the draper's shop, but forgot the bag altogether, which Violet left in her uncle's room. And Granny couldn't be angry, because she was so surprised at all she heard. And everybody was so happy, that the children were allowed to sit up an hour later, and even then they couldn't go to sleep for a long time, because they had so much to think of.

And the next day, Popsy came and brought an invitation for Mrs. Orington and Mrs. Leslie to dine at Rose Bank on Saturday night; and there was so much to show Popsy that Violet begged very hard to be allowed to stay home from afternoon school, but Mrs. Orington thought that she had too many holidays already.

When Saturday came, and the children all went to Rose Bank in the afternoon, they found Uncle Percy had just arrived there, and heard that he was going to stay till Monday.

Mrs. Dawson was in the highest spirits, and had on her best cap—an enormous structure of muslin, and lace, and white satin, which only came out on very grand occasions. Uncle Percy was a great

favourite with her, and she had not seen him for about two years. She was never tired of reminding him that she had 'served his grandmother before him.'

'You're the very image of her, Mr. Percy,' she said; 'and she was the handsomest woman in our part of the country, that she was.'

'Thank you for the compliment, Nurse.'

'Oh! she was a good soul, Mr. Percy, as ever there was, and never a quarrel in her family, there wasn't. You never heard her speak a harsh word to any one.'

'Well, we've no quarrels now, have we, Nurse? It's all made up now.'

'Yes, bless her little heart, all through that little angel of a child!'

The 'little angel' of a child was at that moment behaving in anything but an angelic way, for she and Frank were both dragging at Dick to see which should get him, and poor Dick was looking the picture of misery. He had grown into a fine handsome fellow, and as Frank and Violet had not seen him for so long, they were very anxious to have him.

There was no cat kept at Lambton Hall, so this animal possessed all the more charm for them.

'Well,' said Uncle Percy, 'I hope you'll soon settle which of you mean to have him, for he's got a bad time of it at present between you.'

It was decided that Violet should have him for ten minutes, and Frank for ten minutes, and Uncle Percy should tell them when the time was up.

Mrs. Dawson presently brought in the tea, and there was the biggest cake that had ever been seen at Auntie Brooks'.

Every one came in to have a cup of tea with Mrs. Dawson, even Uncle Brooks; and every one was merry and happy. And then before the children left, Granny and Mrs. Orington arrived, so that there was quite a large party.

'Why, ma'am,' said Mrs. Dawson to Mrs. Leslie, 'it seems only the other day that you were Miss Kitty, and my mistress Miss Maria; and you were such nice young ladies, there was none like you in all the country round.'

'Ah, Nurse,' said Mrs. Leslie, 'that's a long time ago; and now I'm a grandmother.'

The children were allowed to stay to come into dessert, and then they went home with Maria, who had been feasting in Mrs. Dawson's room, and had informed the old lady that she helped Master Frank and Miss Violet to write the wonderful letter.

Uncle Percy was allowed to take possession of the letter, which he keeps as a curiosity and in remembrance of the happy meeting.

When Mrs. Orington and her mother were leaving Rose Bank that night, the former said :

'Well, Uncle, I think you've been beaten very fairly ; don't you ?'

'Yes, my dear,' he replied ; '*the women have conquered me !*'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WEDDING.

THE meeting in the midsummer holidays was a very merry one. Ernest had already been informed by his mother of the happy ending of all the unpleasantness in the family; so he was full of spirits, and ready for fun of any kind.

Amy Gray had become a great favourite with the children. She had a great deal of intelligence and learnt quickly, and was soon so much before all of them in book-learning that they had often to refer to her for what they wanted to know. In other matters she still sometimes made mistakes, and there were still a few things which the children could teach her. But what was best of all, the children by their open and honest behaviour and their affectionate dispositions had taught her what no book-learning can ever teach; and she on the other hand by her patience and perseverance in gaining knowledge, and her eagerness to learn, and her obedience, had taught them a lesson also; so that each had

profited from the other, and Mrs. Orington never regretted what she had done.

Ted Wilberforce came home this time, and of course he was at once introduced to Ned, and the goats, and the carriage; and many an expedition was made, when Jack and Ned and the goats and all the party went together, and very happy times they had. Sexton, who had the care of the goats and carriage, had kept them very carefully, and the carriage still looked almost as good as new.

Amy's thirteenth birthday occurred just after the holidays commenced, and there was such a heap of presents for her on the table. She was overcome with joy when she saw them all. Her previous birthday having happened only a few days after her arrival, was not noticed, and this was the first time within her remembrance that she knew what it was to have a birthday present. There were so many things which most little girls in happy homes possess that she wanted, that there was no difficulty in making a choice. During the twelvemonth she had lived at Lambton Hall, some small presents had from time to time been given her; but there were still many things wanting which some young ladies of thirteen would consider absolute necessaries.

She had had a small blotting-case and work-basket given to her at Christmas; but now there

were a large work-box and desk, both beautifully furnished, the former given by Mrs. Leslie, and the latter by Mrs. Orington. From Ernest there was a photographic album, containing photographs of his mother and granny and brother and sister; from Frank, an illustrated book on birds; and from Violet, a book on wild flowers. Amy could hardly believe all these beautiful things were for her, and she thought of the poor girls at the orphan school, how pleased they would be with any one of the things.

Then, just as they were leaving the breakfast-room, a footman came round from Castlemans with a little parcel, on which was tied a little card.

Ernest and Frank, who had seen the footman from the dining-room window, ran into the hall, and shouted out:

'Come along, Amy, and see what it is! It says, "For Miss Amy, with Ted's compliments." It's something long and thin.'

Amy opened it with trembling fingers. It was a charming French fan, which Mrs. Wilberforce had brought from Paris.

'Oh dear! I'm so warm!' said Violet; 'let me try it!'

Then Auntie Brooks came in presently with Popsy, and when she heard it was Amy's birthday, and saw all the presents, she put two half-crowns into the girl's hand, and said, 'There, my dear,

there's a trifle.' And Popsy said she should like to give something, and that she was going to London that afternoon, and would buy a purse. So Amy was quite a rich girl all at once, and kept looking at all her beautiful presents.

After this Auntie and Popsy and Mrs. Orington were engaged for a couple of hours over something mysterious in Mrs. Orington's bedroom; and Violet, who generally knew everything before any of the others, because she slept in her mother's bedroom and heard a great deal, looked very mysterious too, and said she thought she knew what Mudge and Auntie and Cousin were doing up there, but she wasn't going to tell.

And just as they were all in the middle of a game with Ted Wilberforce, Maria came to say that Miss Amy and Miss Violet were wanted up-stairs.

They found Auntie, and Popsy, and Mudge, and Granny up-stairs, and a strange person they did not know, who was a dressmaker, and there were all sorts of beautiful things scattered about.

'Now, Violet,' said her mother, 'Cousin Popsy's going to be married next week, and you are to be bridesmaid, and I want you to try on this pretty frock.' It was a mixture of muslin and lace and pale pink ribbons, and looked very charming indeed, and on the bed were two pretty little hats of white chip, trimmed with pale pink roses.

'Oh! how beautiful!' said Violet, clapping her hands; 'and is this hat for me?'

'Yes, darling.'

'And who is the other for?'

'You shall see presently.'

Violet tried on her dress, which wanted just a little alteration; and after she had admired herself sufficiently in it and tried on the hat, Mrs. Orington said:

'And now, Amy, do you remember last year I told you you should look at yourself in this glass and see how much you altered?'

'Yes,' said Amy, blushing, remembering how vain she was then.

'I didn't think when I said it, Amy, that you would have such a pretty dress to see yourself in as this,' pointing to one just like Violet's; 'but you are going to be Popsy's bridesmaid, and I want to see if this fits you.'

Amy's eyes sparkled with delight. She had never worn such a beautiful dress in her life.

'There now!' said Mrs. Orington when she had put it on, and also the hat; 'I think what I said has come true. You have rosy cheeks, and bright eyes, and your hair is growing, and you are a very pleasant little girl to look at; though I think you ought to be called a big girl now, for you have grown a great deal since last year. But what is best of all is, that

you are a good girl; and so long as you are good, you are sure to look pretty and be loved.'

'Oh, Amy, you look beautiful!' said Violet; 'so different from that day, don't you remember, when Mudge brought you away without a bonnet because it was so ugly!'

The boys then came to see the dresses, and Frank, who considered himself a judge of such things, thought them very pretty.

But how Violet clapped her hands, and how Amy's bright eyes sparkled, when on the wedding morning, after they were dressed, Uncle Percy, who had slept the previous night at Lambton Hall, came into the drawing-room when every one was ready, and opened two little leather cases, and showed two beautiful little lockets and chains lying on blue satin. On the outside of the lockets were initials, two P's being placed back to back in pearls, and an L in the middle in diamonds. Inside were the portraits of Uncle Percy and Cousin Popsy.

Uncle Percy placed one round Violet's neck and kissed her, and then the other round Amy's. How very proud of them they both were!

Then they went to church, and Violet was chief bridesmaid, and held Popsy's bouquet, and felt herself a very important personage. Ernest and Frank both thought she behaved splendidly.

Mrs. Brooks and Mrs. Leslie both looked very

handsome in their pretty new dresses, and the boys said that 'Mudge' looked lovelier than ever in a pale grey dress and white lace shawl.

The bride was charming in her white satin dress, and orange-blossom wreath, and lace veil, and Mrs. Dawson declared she was almost as handsome as her grandmother. The old nurse had a new black silk dress for the occasion, and looked very picturesque in her large muslin cap, a white muslin tippet fastened with a white satin bow, and a large muslin apron trimmed with lace and tied with white satin. She was at the door as the wedding party came home from church, and welcomed them in.

The children had never been at a wedding breakfast before, and they all enjoyed it very much. Amy thought it was like real fairyland, and Frank for some time after always introduced a wedding into his tales.

When they went home in the evening, they carried away a great many pretty and good things that had been given to them from the wedding breakfast; and besides this, Uncle Brooks had given them all a present. The boys' presents were of a more amusing character than what they usually received from their uncle, and Violet's were a small bust of Minerva in Parian marble, a tiny pair of globes, and a beautiful little Japanese cabinet.

'Oh, Uncle,' she said, 'they're all in imitation of my favourite things in your room!'

Mudge and her chicks are still at Lambton Hall, but there is one little change in the family. Frank now goes to school with his brother, but before going he and Ernest had a very serious conversation as to whether it was right for them to leave Mudge without any protection, Frank evidently being of opinion that she should have a 'man in the house,' and that he was man enough for the purpose. After a long consultation, it was agreed that Ned would perhaps take care of her; so Ned was earnestly charged to look after 'dear Mudge,' and the dog pricked up his ears and looked very grave, as if he quite understood the situation and was equal to it.

If there are little girls and boys who are not so troublesome and mischievous as Ernest and Frank and Violet Orington, we feel sure there cannot be found anywhere a happier or more united family than Mudge and her chicks.

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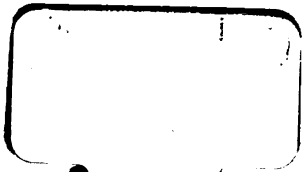
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